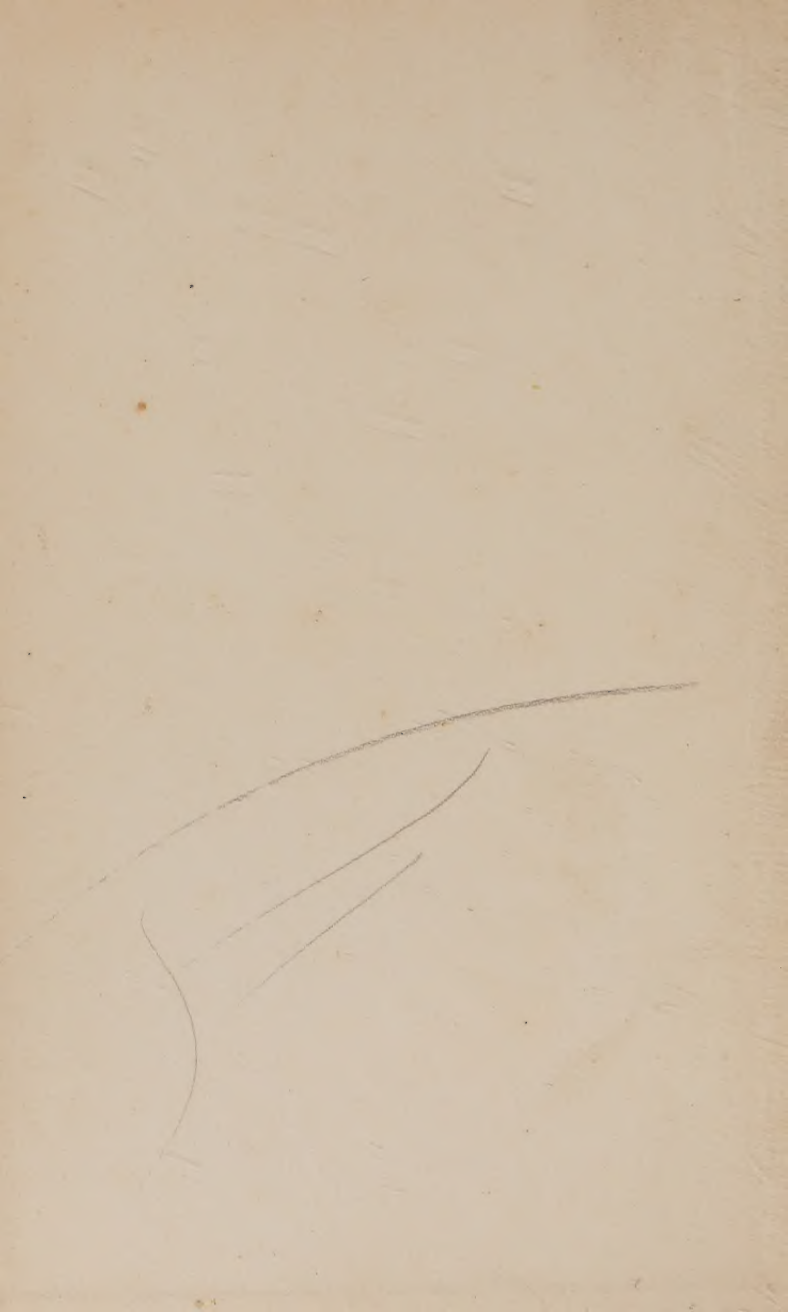
STRINGTOWN ON THE PIKE

by JOHN URI LLOYD



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"*SHE was as bright as a wild red rose;*
She was as fair as a lily that grows
In Palestine"

Stringtown On the Pike

A Tale of Northernmost Kentucky

By

John Uri Lloyd
Author of "Etidorhpa," etc.

With Illustrations

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She was as fair as a lily that grows
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*** *The Kentucky photographic scenes are by Mrs. John Uri Lloyd*

Stringtown on the Pike

MY name is Samuel Drew, and I am now professor of chemistry in the University on the Hill. When I think of my boyhood, memories of the Kentucky pike arise, and I recall the experiences of Sammy Drew, a barefooted child. The boy who, in August's heat, between noonday and mid-afternoon, dared to walk barefooted upon that road, raised his feet quickly. I know whereof I speak, for I often relieved my blistering soles by slipping aside into the weed-lined by-paths, preferring them, even if they passed near the honey-locust tree, under which danger lurked in the great brown thorns that always menace the barefooted boy of Kentucky. That pike is yet vivid to memory. Again I see the dust of bygone times. Again the sun's fierce rays force me to greater laziness. Often I seek a shade tree at the roadside, there to find the grassy brink of a grateful spring and, leaning over the sward, bury my face in the hard limestone water, drinking deep and long. Then, thoroughly content, I sit on the overhanging sod in the shadow of the tree, and spatter the cool water with my toes, bathing a stone-bruise in the very fount from which I drank. With nose-tip close to the water's surface, I eye the flitting cloud shadows, scan the reflected tan-freckled face, and watch the water-bugs and crawfish as, deep in the limpid pool, they stir the sand in the vein's

mouth. Finally I turn upon my back and gaze into space, dreaming of nothing, thinking of nothing.

. . . . . .

From earliest school-days chemistry excited my keenest interest. When but a child I sat absorbed during the experiments made by the teacher while he instructed the advanced class — the class in chemistry — of our country school. By chance I finally obtained a copy of "Comstock's Chemistry," and day by day kept abreast with the students who recited in that subtle science.

Either luck or fate made a chemist of me, — luck, because the subject chanced to be taught in my room; or fate, because "what is to be will be." I could not carry a rule in "Brown's Grammar" from one day to another, and I still detest the word "grammar" because of those twenty-six artificial rules. If I committed to memory some portions of history, in a week thereafter I mixed the incidents, unless they were connected with something of chemical significance. I could not have remembered from day to day whether Gustavus Adolphus fought in the War of the Roses or conducted the Thirty Years' conflict. Of everything but chemistry my head seemed vacant. All else slipped through as a wind-struck fog flies through a leafless woodland. The result was that, though other subjects filtered out of my brain as through a sieve, chemistry remained securely caught by the mind meshes. I should add, however, that historical events connected with the enticing science remained, as, under similar conditions, did mathematical signs and formulæ. Chemistry served as a nucleus of attachment. My one-sided mind caught the chemistry of a subject and bound thereto or blended therewith all connected matters, as alcohol blends ether and water. The teacher scolded me often in the kindness of severity for my indifference

to other subjects. I was one of the blockheads; at least he seemed to regard me as such, not appearing to know anything of my one talent. The little boys of my row each learned something concerning everything, as do all mediocre brains, and one by one passed beyond me; and I, in humiliation, sat conspicuous among younger children, absorbed in the one unreached study that was destined in after years to wreck my life. Chemistry! Would to God I could blot out the word!

CHAPTER I

THE VISION IN THE MOONLIGHT

RETURNING unexpectedly to my little home one Saturday afternoon, I found Professor Drake, the village school-teacher, in conversation with my mother. Before my presence was noticed — for, being barefooted, my step was noiseless — I caught the fragment of a sentence: "It is painful to be forced to tell a mother these facts about her son, but duty compels me to say that I despair of teaching him." Then seeing me, he paused and said something about continuing the subject at another time. Slow as I was in some respects, his words needed no interpretation. My cheek burned in humiliation, my heart beat violently; for it is not pleasant to one mentally incapacitated to hear the fact stated, and, less still, for one who loved his mother as intensely as I did, to realise that the most painful part of her life of devoted privation was small in comparison with the distress that resulted from my stupidity. I was indignant, and felt tempted to return and upbraid the teacher, for were not his words the immediate cause of my mother's sorrow? Her face was expressive of despair. But the facts were on the pedagogue's side; and, moreover, I appreciated that he, too, grieved over my misfortune. I fled from the house and aimlessly moved on, meditating, miserable. I climbed the back fence into the

woodland pasture, upon which our little garden jutted, and after crossing it wandered away from Stringtown, I cared not whither. An hour passed, and my anger and mortification subsided. I ceased to think of the incident; indeed, no record remained to remind my now dormant intellect of the fact that I existed. My mind had become as unconscious of all external things as it was of inherent emotions. My limbs moved irresponsively and my body automatically passed along. I fancy that I had assumed the condition of a brute of the lower class or a creature like the turtle, the difference being that in my brain an intellectual spark rested, and through it the drowsy I of self could be excited into consciousness, while the lethargic mind of the turtle rests irredeemably in the unreachable shadows without. The great distinction between man and brute is that man knows he is man, and the brute knows nothing of himself. I existed and was awake, it is true, but in this trance that possessed me knew nothing of external things.

The sun sank slowly toward the distant tree-tops, and still I wandered without method. The village disappeared behind me, but, regardless of my whereabouts, I strolled dreamfully along until at last I stumbled over an inequality in the grass. And as the flash shoots upward when a spark touches a fibre of gun-cotton, so the sudden fall caused my mind to dart back into self-consciousness. The instant I fell I became aware of the fact that never before had I ventured into the present locality. I next observed a shadow that the sinking sun seemed to throw toward me. A long shadow upon the hill behind which he was disappearing, stretching toward me, took the form of a gigantic cross, the apex reaching to and touching the mound beside me.

This did not, at the instant, cause me the least concern; a shadow is but a shadow. I raised my eyes to seek the object that broke the ray of sunshine, and, child that I was, marvelled then at the miracle; for smooth, as if planed by hand, the top of the hill stretched across my field of vision; there was no intervening object between the sun and me. The face of the day king, unmarked by tree or shrub, shone clear and untarnished over a horizontal ridge-summit that was fenceless, objectless, as straight as a ruler. Stretching down the barren hillside, came those rays straight into my face; and down that smooth hillside projected toward me, as if it had an intent in thus pointing at myself, the great grey shadow lay sharp, and as still as if carved in stone — an effect without a cause — and just beyond its tip I lay trembling.

I now realised fully my location. He who heeded not the warning to avoid that spot bred trouble for his future. Never before had village boy dared to press the grass where I reclined. Never before had child beheld either sunshine or shadow from the place I occupied, — a spot, it was said, the Indians shunned because of its evil influence on him involved in its occult mazes. In the tradition of the early settlers an Indian maiden had here met a tragic death; and we knew that it was here that the father of the "Corn Bug" (so nicknamed because of his propensity for the juice of the corn) had been murdered. In mature life no intelligent person believes ghost stories or these absurd Indian traditions; tales that cluster around every precinct of our land and find resting place in the minds of children and of ignorant people. But to us children, and to the negroes with whom we were so intimate, that place was accursed, and would so have been held by us, even in the face of any testimony to the contrary. Although the soil was rich,

BLOODY Hollow. "In this silent dell I now lay alone"

bushes of sassafras and persimmons — God's emissaries for worn-out grounds too poor for other plant existence — refused to grow on or near the spot. In this silent dell of the "dark and bloody ground," that from a distance we children, venturing cautiously, had once timidly approached, whisperingly pointed to, and then, huddled together, ran from as if from Satan, I now lay alone. My heart throbbed and thumped, my flesh quivered at I knew not what, my limbs refused to move; and the face of the great sun, clear as crystal and bright as molten silver, sank slowly in the west. Simultaneously the weird earth shadow, that singular grey cross, fell slowly toward me. I watched it lengthen until the distended arms crept over my form and enveloped me, and then a quivering play of changing sunset-lights spread about the sky, amid which at last the upper rim of the sun disappeared, the rays flickered; yet, strangely enough, before twilight deepened darkness fell upon me. Whether the shadow to which I refer was an object from the material or outside part of life that appeared to my real eyesight, or a shade from the inner circle that impressed my perceptive faculties, I shall not presume to say; the reader may form his own conclusions concerning the cause of the phenomenon. I report only what I witnessed; and I yet recall vividly the spectral outline of this weird, strange shadow, stretching without discernible cause down the long, barren hillside. I remember that as I lay prostrate on the lone tomb, gazing at the approaching umbra, I wondered first if it would reach my feet, and then, as its apex passed over them, if its great arms would engulf me. I remember to have given a sigh of relief as the last vestige of the sun was about to disappear; for I had unconsciously accepted, without think-

ing it out, that should the arms of the grey cross reach my body, my life would end with the sinking of the sun and the lengthening of the shadow. Then I recollect that as the upper rim of the crescent sun sank and passed from view, and the final slanting rays bent themselves and streamed upward, the arms of the cross at the same instant passed over my body, — and I recollect nothing more. How long I lay in the dew of the blue grass I cannot say, but when I regained consciousness it was as if I were awakening from a dream.

It seemed as though I had been possessed of a vision, yet no details remained. I had surely experienced the knowledge of sweets and sours, sorrow and pain, peace and distress, but not of things, thoughts, or sights. A black object, wrapped in black paper, has an existence in the night, although it cannot be seen; a fragment of platinum foil, thrown on a surface of molten silver, has an existence in the light, yet is not to be seen; a transparent object in a transparent liquid held between the eye and the sun *is*, and yet is not perceptible to the sight. Thoughts and experiences of my sleeping self had been realities, but to my waking self were not real. I had lived and died, had passed into other realms and back again, and experiencing all, I yet recollected nothing. This struck me as more than strange; but only for an instant did I think of the occurrence, for I realised immediately that I was not now alone. As yet I had not opened my eyes; but as the sleeping child intently watched becomes restless, stirs before it awakes, so did I feel the presence of some body or spirit other than my own.

Cautiously seeking to discover the person gazing at me, for my nerves were conscious of that piercing eye,

I raised myself upon my elbow and peered about, to see standing close behind me an Indian girl, tall, erect, beautiful. By the light of a full moon I saw her form clearly, distinctly, and noted that her head was decorated in gaily coloured feathers, and that her dress was made of the draped skins of animals. Her bosom was partly covered, partly bare; her face and bust together, as I now recall the scene, making a picture that might serve as an artist's ideal. One hand rested on her side; the fourth finger of the other was placed upon her lip, as if, in the language all nations understand, the language of signs, she were bidding me be silent; and thus she stood, with elbows extended, gazing before her. She made no movement, and, as one entranced, I lay motionless at her feet. She seemed to be listening for a sound, and to fear that I would move or speak; but I was powerless and could not move.

Then again I observed a strange phenomenon. The graceful position her form unconsciously assumed cast a shadow over the earth, on and up and into the clear sky. Over the crest of the hill, back toward where the sun had sunk, the figure of a gigantic cross high in heaven was uplifted, — a perfect cross. The distended elbows of the maiden created the two shadow-arms of the weird cross, and from behind her, shining through her form as through a haze, I saw the rising moon's face. Marvellous apparition! The visage of the moon peered at me through her very body, and thrust that shadow over the earth and into space beyond. Strange — I remember to have thought — strange that when facing the sun I should have closed my eyes upon a cross upon the earth, and opened them upon an overlying cross in heaven. Yet while this query led my wondering thoughts, it did not surprise me that the girl's form was translucent;

neither did it seem remarkable that I heard, in answer to my mind's words, the reply, —

"Not strange at all. The figure before you was present while the sun still shone, but such creations are invisible in the sunlight. She it was who absorbed the radiance of the sun's rays, and thus permitted the shafts of darkness behind her to cast back at the sun the skeleton of that depleted sun-ray. The shadow observed on the hillside in the sunlight resulted from the dominating power of the shade of darkness behind. To mortals the sun prevails over all else, but to other existences shade is the reality. She whom you now see is only perceptible when a person occupies the peculiar position, both of body and mind, that you now enjoy; not every one can see what you behold."

My reverie was at this point suddenly interrupted; a second shadow crossed the moon's face, and I beheld, stealthily approaching the girl from behind, an Indian with uplifted stone axe. I tried to scream, to move, but could not. The smile on the face of the unsuspecting girl remained sweetly, wildly beautiful. Behind her countenance that other face peering through her own — as if the tracing of a saint were thrown before the picture of a devil — leered, sinister, desperate, ugly; and through both of them the moon was shining. I tried again to warn her of the danger, but could not break the spell that bound me; staring, motionless and powerless, I saw the uplifted war-axe of the phantom chief sink deep into the black hair that covered her spectral skull.

Following now a sheep-path along a hillside, now a corn-row through the field, now a dry creek-bed, I ran. Whether my course led to the right or the left concerned me not. I only asked to leave that hateful valley as far behind as my strength would carry me. Could I

have known the way, I would certainly have fled to my home; but I sped bewildered, and saw no familiar landmark. A sudden rustle of the bushes at my feet caused my heart to jump, my steps to halt; a timid rabbit crossed my path, vanishing in the darkness as quickly as it had sprung from cover. Again I fled, only to halt, trembling; an object, black, of mammoth size, of strange shape, appeared before me, and as I stood transfixed the monstrous form grew before my eyes, evolved from nothing. Floating from out the air, it towered to the very heavens above; and then as suddenly as it had appeared did it shrink and assume the familiar form of a black cow. She advanced along the path upon which I stood, steadily and peaceably, possibly ruminating over subjects too deep for human cogitation. Quickly it flashed upon my mind that to trace back the path the cow had trodden would carry me to the barnyard and the home of her owner, and acting on the impulse, I fixed my gaze upon the moonlit ground and steadily walked along that well-defined cow-path. When next I raised my eyes, the light of a candle shining through a window gladdened my sight; with rapid step I reached an open doorway, and without knocking or even sounding a cry leaped into the room. As I made that last spring forward, it seemed as though unseen hands clutched my coat-sleeves, as though goblins and ghosts threw themselves upon me, as though weird arms encircled my form and clutched my ankles and feet, and as though superhuman things cried and moaned about me.

CHAPTER II

CUPE'S STORY AND THE OMEN

A DELIGHTFUL sensation came over me as I lay in security once more among human beings. Only those who have been through experiences such as I suffered can appreciate the relief I felt. God help the coward! God pity him who, frightened, lies powerless with consciousness intact. Fright blots out all other pain; and he who adds one useless pang to the suffering of a terrified creature must answer for that despicable act in the hereafter where sins are expiated.

Exhausted, bleeding, suffering physical pain, and yet content, I rested upon the floor, mentally taking note of the surroundings. The room was that of a plain log house. The floor was very rough, being made of hewn, split beech logs, the rounded portion down, the edges roughly jointed together. The furniture was of the simplest description; the place was lighted by a single candle. A girl and a man occupied the cabin, the latter none other than the "Corn Bug;" and it was evident that I had wandered from my course perhaps in a spiral out and back again, for the valley in which I saw the strange grey cross was, I well knew, but a short distance from the rude log house in which I now was sheltered. The other occupant of the house was to me unknown: a singular little creature, with great eyes and round face encircled by wild flowing hair, a curious child who fas-

cinated my gaze despite my pain and terror. The silence caused by my strange entrance was at length broken by the "Corn Bug."

"Sammy, what 's the matter?" he said.

"I am lost," I answered.

"Not while you are here."

"I was scared."

"Wall," he continued slowly, "thare ain't no bars ner catamounts now; why did n't yo' lie down beside a fence er in a briar patch this warm night an' sleep?"

"I was too scared."

"What scared yo', sonny? Thare ain't no varmints hareabout."

"I saw something terrible."

"What war it? Tell me what yo' saw."

"I can't," I replied with a shudder.

"Wha' wa' yo'?"

"In Bloody Hollow."

The look of incredulity passed from his face; he came at once to my side, raised me from the floor, led me to his own chair, and seated me by the side of the little girl.

"Cupe," he called out, — "Cupe, yo' lazy nigger, git up; the boy 't yo' told me about es here."

There was a noise overhead, and then through a hole in the ceiling appeared two legs, and Cupe began the descent of the ladder which led to the cubby hole of the attic.

"What fo' yo' call Cupe, Ma'se?"

"The boy, Cupe, the boy 't ye said would come from Bloody Holler. Here es the boy."

The white-headed negro manifested no surprise.

"I done tole yo' so, Ma'se," he said reflectively; "I knowed he wah com'n'; de signs nebbah lie, Ma'se; de figgah in de fiah, de hoodoo tracks in de ashes, de tings

dis nigger saw an' hea'd when de chicken crowed las' night fo' midnight, tings what de white man doan know nuffin' 'bout, pinted t' de movin' ob de spell. Ma'se, tings p'dicted am come. Ole Ma'se, yoah pap, sleep in Bloody Hollah an' den he died es Cupe said he would; de gearl sleep in Bloody Hollah, an' now de boy am heah. De end ob de spell am nearly come."

"What air yo' talkin' about, yo' black scoundrel?" muttered the "Corn Bug."

"Nebbah yo' min', Ma'se, dah ain't no use in borrowin' troub'l; nebbah yo' min', Ma'se; de spell will end fo' yo' when de yeah ends, an' den yo' an' ole Cupe mus' part."

"Talk sense, Cupe, talk sense; I told yo' to come down out ov your loft, not because I want any ov youah goblin nonsense, nor any ov youah nigger signs, but ter tie up the scratches on this youngster's feet; can't yo' see he es tired an' sore an' scared nearly ter death? Move, yo' black rascal, move!"

Old Cupe, muttering to himself, obeyed; he washed and bound up my lacerated feet, having first anointed them with a sweet-scented soothing ointment made of the resin of the sweet-gum tree.

"Now for his supper," said the "Corn Bug." "Stir yourself, Dinah!"

Then I noticed another form gather itself, as if it were created from the shadows. From the edge of the hearth, where, motionless, she had been huddled, an old black negro crone arose and silently busied herself arranging my supper, which proved to be simple enough, but very sweet to the taste. Then when the task was done and the dishes had been removed, she slunk back to the shadows, and in the edge of the light-flittings, where the seen and the unseen blended, crouched

again on the hearth, clasped her hands around her ankles, drawing them close to her body, and rested her chin on her knees. Part of her form was visible in the firelight, part was blotted out; and thus she crouched motionless, silently eyeing me. When I had finished the meal, Cupe again began talking to the "Corn Bug."

"Ma'se, yo' mus' lis'n t' what Cupe says, case he means yo' well. Dis nigger hab nuss'd yo' since yo' wah a little tot; he hab raised yo', honey. He nebbah lef' yo', chile. When uddah niggers desarted de plantation, Cupe stood by yo', an' yo' knows dat eb'ry bressed word he ebah tole yo' wah God's truff. Now lis'n, Ma'se; de preachah nebbah spoke mo'ah serous dan Cupe do now. De signs p'dicted am come. Cupe hab kept t' hisse'f what ole Ma'se tole him in de ole mansion house dat bu'n down ahftah Ma'se wah killed, an' now de time am come fo' yo' t' know what Cupe hab t' tell t' yo.' Yo' calls et nigger signs, but lis'n, Ma'se. Who stuck closer t' yo' all dese yeahs dan dis nigger hab done; an' what fo' should Cupe fool yo', Ma'se? Now white man an' nigger mus' not try t' circumbent Prov'dence; an' de time am come fo' Cupe t' act, case Cupe am done gwine t' tole yo' sump'n' now what no man ebah know 'cep'n' Cupe an' de dead folks what caint talk t' de likes ob yo'. Lis'n t' Cupe's story, Ma'se.

"Ole Ma'se, yoah pap, wah a wile chile. Nighttime come, he wah rac'n' ober de country cotch'n coons, danc'n' shindigs, gwine ter places wha he nebbah ought t' had be'n, actin' up in ways dat ole Cupe doan care t' memberlec', an' doan intend t' memberlec'. Wall, one mahn'n' in de time ob de yeah when de 'simmons wah jes git'n' sof' an' de 'possum wah git'n' fat an' de co'n wah bein' shocked, ole Ma'se come home an' say t' Cupe: 'Cupe, lay in de back logs an' git de mansion in

order; fer on de las' day ob de yeah dah 'l be a wed'n', an' yo' niggers 'll hab a missus.' 'Fo' de Lawd, dis nigger wah s'prized. He wah not 'quainte' wid all de signs den, else he would hab seed de ebil com'n'."

A low chant, melody without words, negro melody that harmonised strangely with Cupe's pathetic expressions, arose from the lips of the shadow-clad old crone. Evidently her mind was vibrating in unison with Cupe's words, and until the chant died away old Cupe stood silent. Then he resumed: —

"Howsumebbah, Cupe knowed some tings, an' he say t' ole Ma'se: 'Ma'se, doan bring trouble on yoah head.' Ole Ma'se ansah: 'Yo' brack rascal, why cain't one man marry es well es 'nuddah?' ''T ain't dat, Ma'se,' Cupe say: 'de marryin' is all right, else de good Book would n't say so. *It am de time.* Nebbah marry on de las' day ob de yeah, lessen yo' want trouble. It am a slap in de face ob Prov'dence, Ma'se. Wait one day longah, Ma'se; all de niggers 'll tole yo' trouble come lessen yo' lis'n t' 'vice.'

"'What a nigger know 'bout Prov'dence? Damn yoah nigger nonsense!' say ole Ma'se.

"An', suah nuff, when de las' day ob de yeah come, he did marry Missus Alice, yoah mudder, one ob de sweetes' creatures. Lawd! Lawd! chile, but she wah a honey! But all de niggers shake der heads an' slip away de wed'n' night, an' stan' roun' gloomy-like, an' whisper t' demsels, an' suah nuff nigger sign come out right; an' de end ob dat mistake ain't come yet. Nebbah mo'ah did Ma'se hab any luck. One night de bahn buhn; next winter six ob de best niggers done run off t' Canerdy; dem fool niggers. Den ole Ma'se gits cross an' takes powerful strong t' his cups, an' night ahftah night dat sweet young missus would hab t' sleep in her

big room wid Aunt Dinah on de flo' by de bed, an' ole Cupe on de flo' by de doah outside in de hall. An' missus would cry herse'f t' sleep, an' in de mahn'n when ole Ma'se come home swearin' an' cross, she, honey deah, would fro her arms 'roun' his neck an' — oh ! wall, Ma'se, what 's de use ob 'memb'h'n eb'ryting ? "

" De honey deah, de honey deah ! " moaned Dinah; " bress de sweet chile."

" Shet yoah mouf, Dinah ; dis am no time fo' blub'rin' niggers," Cupe rudely said ; and then continued :

" So at las', one stormy night ole Ma'se git on horseback an' ride off t' de tab'n, an' dat night yo' come inter de world, Ma'se honey. Bress de soul ob yoah deah angel muddah. When de nigger what go fo' ole Ma'se fin' him, he wah playin' keards at de tab'n an' he cuss an' swar case de nigger say missus wan' him quick, an' nebbah a step would he move till mahn'n come ; an' jes befo' ole Ma'se step in de doah de angels carry de sweet missus out ob de windah. She lib only a few hours ahftah she see de face ob her baby chile. Yo' am dat chile, Ma'se. De doctah know she could n't las', an' he ax her ef she hab any word t' say befo' she go t' glory ; an' she say say yes, an' ax fo' Cupe.

" Lawd, Lawd, Ma'se ! dat wah awful hard times. Cupe take his shoes off, an' tiptoe in de room, an' kneel down by de bed, an' cry like a baby, an' say very gentle-like : ' Fo' de Lawd, honey, Cupe ain't t' blame fo' de troub'l, case he wahne' Ma'se ob de ebil what come ob marryin' on de las' day ob de yeah.' An' she say, berry weak-like : ' T ain't dat, Cupe; yo' alls am yinnercent. What I wan' t' say am 'bout tings wot comes heah-oftah.' Den she say : ' Cupe, when I am gone, dis little yinnercent babe won't hab no muddah an' de Lawd

only knows what kind ob a fahdah.' Cupe he keep still an' make no ansah, fo' what could he say? an' he only cry an' cry. Den missus say: 'Cupe, nebbah yo' lebe dis chile; nebbah; promise me dat, Cupe.' An' Cupe say: 'Fo' de Lawd, missus, I promise.' Den missus say: 'Cupe, yo' is a nigger, an' all niggers can't do what dey wants t', but yo' is not a fiel' nigger, yo' is a fam'ly nigger, an' yo' will nebbah be sold, nebbah.[1] An' nebbah mus' yo' lebe dis chile 'cep'n' it am fo' de good ob de chile.' An' I swar befo' de Lawd t' missus dat nebbah de weddah shall be too hot, nebbah too cole, t' keep Cupe from doin' his duty to de new blos'm. An' den she reach out her han', monstrous weak-like, an' ole Cupe smuddah it wid kisses, an' keep a kiss'n', fo' he could n't talk, an' he had n't nuffin' else t' do."

A wail came from the crouching form on the hearth. A wail that spoke as words could not have done of the impression Cupe's story was making on the solitary witness of that night's experience. Old Cupe stopped his discourse and this time waited patiently until the last sound died away, then resumed as if there had been no interruption.

"An' den de doctah, he say: 'Cupe, lay de han' back, Cupe;' an' de doctah go sof'ly t' de doah an' call Aunt Dinah, who had gone out t' cry, an' he say t' Dinah: 'Take de chile, Dinah; yo' am now de mammy;' an' den he smoove de cubbahleds an' Cupe say how easy-like missus go t' sleep when she git de trouble off her min', an' de doctah say: 'Yes, Cupe, nebbah t' wake.' An' den ole Cupe look close at de face an' see dat de deah young missus wah dead. Her sweet spirit had

[1] Great distinction was made between family and field slaves. Family slaves often were free to talk as the master's children were not permitted to do.

gone t' glory while ole Cupe kiss de han' ob de missus what wah.

"An' Cupe moan and cry an' de doctah come an' say, monstrous sah'ful-like: 'Doan yo' know, Cupe, dat she am happy now? Dah ain't no swar words, dah ain't no tab'n, dah ain't no coon dawgs yelpin' all night wha' she am now.' Cupe say: ''T ain't dat, Ma'se Doctah; case she am gone t' glory, de Lawd knows she am happy now; 't aint dat — but de ebil sign.' 'What ebil sign?' say the Doctah, an' Cupe say: 'Trouble, pile on top ob trouble; fo' de deah missus is done gone t' glory an' Cupe had de han' kiss'n' it like es it wah alibe. No wussah sign could be. God help the chile, Ma'se Doctah! God help de blos'm!'[1] An' de doctah could n't no moah ansah sech argyment dan de preachah kin. He say, says he: 'Nigger signs air nigger signs.'

"Now Ma'se honey," Cupe said, suddenly addressing the "Corn Bug," "Ma'se honey, hab Cupe not done what he promis'd yoah deah muddah? Hab he ebah lef' yo'? Hab he not stuck closer t' yo' dan a tick sleep'n' b'hin' a dawg's ear? Hab de weddah ebah be'n too hot er too cole fo' Cupe t' sarve yo'? Hab yo' ebah got any sarse words back when yo' cuss ole Cupe? Ma'se, yo' know dat ef yo' had done what Cupe wanted, yo' would hab been well edye'cate' an' a fine gem'n like Ma'se Manley am. Yo' knows dat ole Cupe trot ahftah yo' from de day yo' wah a chile until what yo' air now, an' hab begged an' prayed dat yo' lis'n t' Cupe when yo' go on de wile track."

"Yes," conceded the "Corn Bug;" "yes, Cupe, yo' hev been a good nigger."

"Wall, what fo' Cupe lie now, Ma'se? What fo'

[1] No worse omen could appear than for a chicken or animal of any kind to die in one's hand. Old Cupe received a fearful stroke when he held that dying hand.

Cupe say tings dat am not so? Lis'n, Ma'se honey; de day befo' ole Ma'se wah killed Cupe wahn' him ob de danger in de air. Ma'se he laff, at first, but Cupe say t' him, es he say t' yo', 'What fo' should Cupe lie?' When ole Ma'se heah dat argyment he lis'n' like an' say t' Cupe, 'Cupe, life am mighty onsartin'. Nigger sign er no nigger sign, life am onsartin', an' I guess, Cupe, I might es well es not tells yo' some tings t' do in case yoah uddah nigger signs am right; not dat I b'lebe in tings yo' talk 'bout; fo',' says ole Ma'se, says he, 'niggers am 'stish'us.' Den he go on, kindah talkin' to hisse'f: 'Howsumebbah, niggers am not fools. 'Sides,' say ole Ma'se, 'yo' is true t' yoah friends, Cupe, an' dat 's moah dan I can say fo' de white people what sit on de seat an' play keards 'longside me.' So he git sollum' like, an' say, says he: 'Cupe, if yoah nigger sign consahnin' me comes true, an' dey hab monstrous often come out right, dah air uddah nigger signs what will come true consahnin' tings heahoftah. Cupe,' Ma'se say, 'I hab be'n a fool, Cupe, an' it air too late t' quit. I hab be'n a fool, Cupe, an' I knows it an' don't keer t' quit, case et air pleasant-like now t' be a fool. But yo' hab stuck t' me an' t' de chile, an' de time may come when yo' will wan' t' be free.' An' den he took a papah out ob his pocket an' say, says he: 'Dese heah papahs am all 'cordin' t' law, an' when yo' show dem, yo' is a free man.'

"Cupe he take de papah, an' try t' t'ank him, but de Ma'se go on wid de talk an' would n't let him say nuffin'. 'Keep yoah mouf shet an' doan gib me no back talk,' he say. 'Dah am jes one ting fo' yo' t' do, an' dat air t' stick t' de chile.'

"'Deed I will, Ma'se. I done promise de missus dat de night de angels come.'

"'Stick t' de chile, Cupe,' he say. An' den de Ma'se stop talkin' an' walk off.

"So much fo' yoah pap, an' now fo' yoah gran'pap an' my pap."

"Go on," said the "Corn Bug."

"Wall, yo' knows es well es Cupe, dat ole Ma'se, yoah pap, wah killed in Bloody Hollah, an' he wah tole by Cupe dat he would be killed likes he wah, jes es Cupe tole yo' 'bout dis boy comin' t'-night an' de gearl com'n' de day dat she did come. Howsumebbah, dat doan consahn yo' jes now. What I gwine t' say consahns ole Ma'se's fahdah, de fit'n Colonel; he wah yoah gran'pap, an' my pap wah his nigger, jes es Cupe air yoah nigger. An' what pass' between ole Colonel, yoah gran'pap, an' my pap, yoah fahdah nebbah know'd, case the sign wah not right an' Cupe could n't speak widout de sign; but now de sign p'dicted am heah, an' Cupe gwine t' tole yo' 'bout what yo' nebbah 'spected in all yoah bohn days.

"Ole Ma'se's fahdah (yoah gran'pap) say t' Cupe's fahdah (my pap) long years ago: 'All dese lan's b'longs t' me; all ober behin' de big woods is mine; all dis part ob dis country is mine.' Den he took pap to his iron trunk w'ich he brought from Mexiky wha' he wah fit'n 'long wid Ma'se Butler, who lib' in Cah'lton — de chist what nebbah no libbin' soul 'cep' de ole Ma'se had seen into befo', an' he op'n it an' say, says he: 'Dese heah papahs am deeds fo' all de lan's yo' can see if yo' clime de highest tree on de plantation. Now', says he, 'if dis heah son ob mine doan tuhn out good — an' he doan promise much, an' Lawd knows I hain't done much need'h t' make him good — yo' keep dese papahs till he dies; den gib 'em to yoah boy, Cupe; an' tole him what t' do wid em. He am a fam'ly nig-

ger an' won't be sol'. But ef my chile act like a man, yo' can gib him dese papahs an' all dis money.' Wid dat he showed pap a pile ob gol', sech es I nebbah 'spected t' see in all my bohn days."

"You 're lyin', Cupe, yo' know yo' lie," said the "Corn Bug." "I hev seen inside yer iron chest, an' thare ain't no papers nor no gold in et neither."

"Nebbah do yo' min' de chist, Ma'se; nebbah yo' min' 'bout de gol'. Yo' don't git none ob dat; it goes to de chillun what sleep in Bloody Hollah, case de sign say so. Now yo' knows, honey," Cupe continued, "yo' knows, Ma'se honey, dat yo' nebbah hab be'n settled steady, so dat Cupe could do what ole Ma'se axt. De bottle am yoah mastah, an' it wah de mastah ob' yoah pap an' yoah gran'pap, so Cupe hab jes kep' de papahs es my pap kep' dem; an' de money an' de papahs hab been waitin' fo' de sign, an' now de sign am heah."

"What sign, yo' black fool, what sign?" asked the "Corn Bug," with an eagerness which showed that he was more interested in the story than he cared to admit.

"De sign what folks dat doan b'lebe in signs nebbah see," Cupe replied; "but dese two chillun wah mixed up in de sign; Cupe hab done tole yo' dis day, Ma'se, when de sun wah shinin', dat dis heah boy would come when de bat flap, an' de owl hoot t'-night, an' dat Bloody Hollah would mix itse'f a'gin in de consahns ob dis fam'ly?"

"Yes," the "Corn Bug" reluctantly admitted.

"Now lis'n," continued the negro. "Doan temp' Prov'dence, Ma'se; dah air tings de preachah doan know; tings dat teachahs can't read out ob books; tings an ole nigger knows bettah dan book-larned folks. Dah air tings white men can't teach a nigger; 'case nigger sense ain't altogeddah same es white man's sense;

an' dah air tings a nigger can't splain de how an' whah-foh ob t' white folks, 'case white folks' sense ain't 'zac'ly like nigger sense. Kin de dawg 'splain how he cotch de trail ob de coon? Need'h am all niggers de same. S'pose Cupe should try t' show dese half white niggers, poo' mean trash, what my gran'pap larn from his ole mammy, who bring dat sense wid her out ob de hot Gol'coast [1] country, what could Cupe do? Nuffin'. Might es well try ter teach white folks es sech niggers. Ya, ya, ya," he chuckled. "Now, sit still, honey, sit still, an' Cupe will show yo' sump'n' what 'll s'prize yo'."

[1] Gold Coast, the part of Africa Cupe's grandfather came from.

CHAPTER III

THE LOST DEED

HE closed and locked the door, then untied the curtain string and lowered the green paper curtains, and next climbed the ladder that I had seen him descend, telling me to follow him. He opened the cover of an iron chest, and, after fumbling about inside it, asked me to look into its depths. The bottom was covered with a layer of bright gold coins, of which Cupe took a few pieces and then secured a large folded paper, yellowed with age, covered with red seals of wax and tied with a dull ribbon that once perhaps had been of some bright colour. Together we descended to the room below, where Cupe showed the paper and the gold to his master.

The "Corn Bug" stared in amazement, and was reaching for the money when Cupe stopped him.

"Yo' can't tech de gol', Ma'se, de gol' am not fo' yo'."

"Give me the paper," the man impulsively demanded.

"Heah am de dokyments, Ma'se, de papah what ole Colonel, yoah gran'pap say ter my pap would gib yo-uns all de lan's yo' can see from de top ob ole Hick'ry."

The white man took the paper turned it about, eyed it curiously, and then handed it back to Cupe. He could not read.

"Yo' see, Ma'se," said Cupe, "de sign says dat yo' wah not t' read dis papah; it wah to be read by de boy who saw de sky cross in Bloody Hollah."

"Here 's the boy," said the "Corn Bug," "but I hai n't heard him say nuthin' 'bout no sky cross."

Old Cupe turned toward me, and as he did so the negro crone half rose from her place and leaned partly out of the shadows.

"Tole us 'bout de sky cross yo' saw," said Cupe.

I shook my head.

"Dah wah a cross in de sky, an' a cross on de earf, chile?"

I nodded.

"An' yo' saw de hant?"

"Yes, yes, I saw it."

"An' mu'd'h'n?"

"Yes, and murdering, too."

"De cross am gone, an' de blood am gone an' dried dese yeahs dat 's gone, but de hant move on. Back t' yoah place, Dinah, yo' brack fool!"

Dinah sank into her former position, and Cupe turned to his master. "De boy what see de cross am t' read de papah, hab not Cupe done tole yo'? An' de boy what seed de cross am heah."

The "Corn Bug" seemed not to be surprised at the corroboration I gave of Cupe's prediction. "Adzacly," he said, "adzacly."

I took the document and after laborious study managed to decipher it. Even then none of us understood more than the general purport of the paper. But old Cupe had faith in its authenticity. He exultingly cried, when I had laboriously spelled out the last word:

"Cupe done tole yo' so, Ma'se; now what yo' got t' say 'bout de tracks in de ashes, an' de figgah in de fiah, an' de uddah tings what Cupe saw, an' yo' couldn' t understan' an' will nebbah know how he saw dem?"

"Why did n't yo' give me that paper long ago?"

demanded the "Corn Bug." "Where hev yo' kept these things? I hev seen inside thet empty old chest often."

"Take care, honey, take care; doan ax quistions too libely; 't ain't safe t' fool wid dese heah sollum' tings like white folks does wid book readin'." Then Cupe, growing more serious, added:

"Ma'se when de new yeah come yo' an' Cupe 'll part. Dese chillun air t' take yoah place, Ma'se, fo' yo' ll go t' yoah long home. Dat ting am sart'n, Ma'se, de long home am suah t' come. Cupe measure' de cedah limbs ag'in t'-day, an' de young sprout on de long limb stan' six feet from de body ob de tree. Dah am room fo' a coffin undah dat limb suah, an' yo' know yo' wah de man what sot out dat cedah tree."[1]

"Yes, an' will plant another next spring."

"Plant'n' will be done in de new yeah, an' yo' will be dah, but yo' won't hole de spade, an' it won't be a tree what 's planted. Hab not Cupe done tole yo' ob what 's suah t' come t' de man what set out a cedah? Ma'se, when de robins flock nauth t' de roost in de thicket nex' March an' talk in de gloom ob ebenin', yoah ear won't heah de chirpin' voices; when de sugah watah drips in de Feb'uary sunshine, yo' tongue won't taste de sweetness ob de sap, an' yoah eye won't see de brightness ob de sun; an' when de wahm wind blow an' de snow melt in de spring, yoah cheek won't feel de breff dat come out ob de souff."

"Ef I lis'n' to yo', Cupe, I would stop breathin' in order to save my life. Yo' hev a sign fer everything."

"Suah yo' will stop breevin' 'case de dawg Dgawge

[1] The negroes believed that death would come to the man who transplanted a cedar tree, when the lower limbs grew to be the length of his coffin.

Wash'n't'n see yoah hant an' de cedah limb on de tree yo' sot am long nuff t' cubah a coffin. De tree am ready, de groun' am ready, an' de spade am waitin' in de shed. But dah am mo'ah t' say t' yo', fo' de uddah sign say dat ole Cupe, who nebbah desahted yo' in life, won't be by yo' side when de las' call am made. Yo' will hab comp'ny, Ma'se, comp'ny heah when yo' start, an' comp'ny on de way dahabouts. Cupe doan 'tend t' say jes wha' yo' air gwine, er how long de new partner 'll stick t' yo' an' de sign doan say wheddah de landin' place am hot er cole. But when yoah heaht am still an' de mouf am shet tight, de eyes am closed ahftah de silver qua'tahs am taken off, de heels air close t'geddah, an' de toes p'int up, when de cubbah ob de box am screwed down, ole Cupe 'll be back by yoah side a'gin. An' when yo' air laid in de groun' undah de cedah tree yo' planted, close beside yo' deah muddah, who rest undah de limb ob de weepin' willer, an' who go t' glory when yo' wah bohn, ole Cupe 'll be dah. Bettah yo' begin t' git ready fo' dem tings what is p'dicted an' bettah yo' make yo'-se'f good wid de pahson, 'case de pahson am might'ly mixed in yoah affairs, Ma'se, an' dese chillun am mixed too. De signs wahn't quite clear when Cupe read dem dat night, dah wah shaddahs, but de omen on the harf done mix de affairs ob yo' an' de pahson. Doan yo' know, Ma'se, dat when yo' fin' dis baby gearl on de Bloody Hollah grabe dat ole Cupe say take her home an' her mate 'll follah 'case de sign say so? an' hab yo' not done growl an' cuss ole Cupe an' cuss de sign, ah, doan yo' lub de chile now like she wah yo' own, honey? an' ain't de boy heah now?"

"Nigger nonsense," said the "Corn Bug."

"'T ain't safe t' 'fy sollum' tings; bettah shake han's wid de pahson, Ma'se; nebbah min' de nigger nonsense,

make fren's wid de pahson, case dah come a time when de pahson skeah off de fiah bran' an' keep off de debbil too."

"I've no use fer Pahson Jones er his mummery. When next I see the pahson, I'll show yo' how I make friends with his likes."

"De signs am, Ma'se," continued Cupe, heedless of his master's scoffing, "dat Cupe'll stay in de cabin ahftah yo' am gone; de gearl 'll stay, an' de boy 'll come ag'in."

He stopped, went to the fire, and gazed intently into the mouldering embers, then slowly said: "De boy 'll come ag'in t' de cabin in de night-time. De sun am shinin' on both dere heads, but a cloud am risin'. De boy am gone, but bress de Lawd, honey, Cupe am still heah wid de gearl."

Then after a pause he stirred the ashes, smoothed them out, moved his fingers over the surface, seeming to read from the embers as one reads from a book.

"De gearl am in trouble an' go from de cabin; she go' t' de boy; it am in a big house; she kneel on de flo' befo' de boy an' de boy cubbahs his face wid his han's an' shakes his head." With a puzzled look the negro began mumbling unintelligibly, made another little pile of ashes and flattened it out, then spoke again:

"De gearl wid bended head an' tear mark on de cheek come slowly back t' de cabin, dis same cabin, lookin' behin' her to'ards de boy. De boy am in a cu'yus place, wid glass fixin's an' bottles all 'roun' de room; but he am sah'erin' too an' am lookin' back to'ards de gearl. Dey am not chillun now; he am a man, an' she am as pretty es a peach. Lawd, Lawd, honey; but Cupe am still wid her. She am monstrous sah'ful, an' her eyelids am swelled; she come back t' de

cabin an' cry an' moan, an' t'row her arms 'roun' ole brack Cupe's neck, an' den she an' Cupe go up t' de mount'ns. Bress yoah soul, chile; bress yoah soul, honey; God bress yo', honey; God bress yo'!"

Ole Cupe arose and picked up the child, hugged her to his bosom and stroked her dishevelled hair with his bony fingers, before he returned to his incantations. Another period of mummery with the ashes and Cupe laughed aloud: "De clouds am gone, an' de sun shine, but it shines fru brush. De chillun am t'geddah in de ole Kaintuck lan'. T'ank de Lawd, Ma'se!" exclaimed the old negro, then suddenly he drew back and stared into the embers, saying to himself: "What 's de meanin' ob dis? Smoove dem ashes out, Dinah, 'case sump'n' am wrong wid de sign." Suiting her actions to his words, Dinah leaned over and smoothed the ashes with her long, bony fingers, then sat in the shadows, swaying her body back and forth, humming a soft, low song, without words. I crept timidly forward, and gazed over the shoulder of the kneeling seer. I saw that he took three short bits of brown straw and laid them parallel on the perfectly smooth ash surface, the fragments being about three inches apart. "Dah am a new face stan'in wha' de boy stood, it air a boy wid a red head. Dis am de newcomah, de red-head boy," he said, pointing to one straw; "dis am de boy out ob Bloody Hollah," pointing to the second straw; "dis am de honey gearl," pointing to the third. Then, as he spoke, it seems to me that I saw a marvellous thing: — that a perfect coffin-like tracing form crept about the straw of the newcomer, and then that straw caught fire. Old Cupe chuckled, pointing to the straw which represented myself. After a lapse of some minutes this also became surrounded by a similar mark that grew before

my eyes; then it began to burn, and almost simultaneously the last straw, that representing the girl, turned black, then changed into white ashes, snow-white ashes, but I swear it did not burn. Old Cupe threw himself upon the floor and moaned in apparent distress. He did not interpret the result of his incantation other than by this emotion, but quickly arose, and took me by the hand: "Chile," he said, "yo 'll sleep in de bed upstairs, an' Cupe 'll sleep on de flo' by yoah side. Come, chile, it am late in de night, come."

I was too much exhausted to do anything but sleep, yet that night I dreamed. It seemed to me that once I opened my eyes to find old Cupe standing by my bed in the light of the moon that streamed through the little window, mumbling to himself, moving his bony fingers over and near my face as he had done over and near the ashes, and I caught the words: "Cupe bettah strangle de life out ob him now; but cussed am de pusson who breaks de workin's ob de spell." Next morning I was awakened early by a searcher, for the country had been aroused over my absence, and when I reached my home and was folded in the arms of my mother the influence of the night's strange incidents disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

THE "CORN BUG" CURSES THE PARSON

I HAVE now to record a memorable meeting of the village circle which formed about the stove in the country store, during which the "Corn Bug" created a sensation. Without apparent provocation, he indulged in a tirade against the Rev. Mr. Jones, and instead of making friends with that gentleman, as old Cupe had advised, would have driven him from the room had not Professor Drake interfered. The assembled villagers were astounded by his violence. The minister had incurred his dislike by an attempt to reform his dissolute habits, an attempt that unfortunately resulted in arousing the wrath of the person whom he aimed to serve. The "Corn Bug" from that moment adhered to a dogged determination to drink more freely. This evening he seemed unusually vindictive, and without any direct incentive viciously assailed the pastor.

"Sech people as yo', pahson, air like drone bees, always ready ter make a show ov yerselves, but never ready ter work. Yo' eats the best the land raises, yo' talks ter the prittiest girls, an' sits beside them too; yo' wears the best clothes, yo' rests in the shade in the summer an' loafs by the stove in the winter. Yo' wears kid gloves like a woman, an' p·eaches 'bout duty, but never acts et 'less takin' care ov your own carcass es actin' duty. Yo' air never cold lessen yo' lies in bed too late ov a winter mornin' an' gits yer muscles stiff

because yo' air too lazy ter git up an' make the blood move; an' yo' never gits hot except when goin' through the sunshine in the summer from the shade ov a tree ter yer dinner. Yo' Methodists air es afraid ov water es a mad dog, an' would never save a soul ef, in order ter do so, yo' had ter wet yer feet in ice water, when you 'd let the other feller's one soul go an' save yer own two soles. Pshaw! I hev seen Hard Shell Baptists an' Campbellites break the ice at a baptisin' an' walk right inter a pond ov ice water a mile away from a fire; an' yet yo' stands by a stove an' dips the tips ov yer fingers in warm water an' sprinkles et over a baby an' calls thet 'workin' in the Master's field.'

"Yo' would n't laze around all the week, an' eat an' sleep an' sleep an' eat, ef yo' was n't too lazy ter work like a man should work," he continued, growing more insulting as he proceeded: "Yo' would n't take what I am a-givin' yo', either, if yo' had the spunk ov a sick rabbit er the energy ov a sleepin' 'possum. Yo' would n't cross the street in a shower ter save a dyin' child, an' yo' would n't dare crack yer finger in the face ov a turtle-dove fer fear yo' might get pecked."

Professor Drake arose and indignantly demanded order. The pastor had listened in silence, making no response, but it could be seen that his passions were much moved and that he was holding himself in check only by strenuous effort.

"One duty of gospel ministers," he replied rather sadly as the echoes of the insulting voice of the "Corn Bug" died away, "is to teach tolerance and practise forgiveness. God knows it would be easier to strike now than to keep down my anger; but how can we follow the Master we serve, and not forgive those who wrong us? How can we ask others to heed our words

unless we set an example? No doubt, my friends, ministers frequently err. Yes, my hearers, yes, ministers are often to be blamed for errors of judgment or for self-indulgence. They are not always the bright examples in holy living they should be. Perhaps they live in too great luxury; perhaps they have too many pleasures; perhaps they are not willing to undergo privations as they should. My friend," he continued, turning towards his adversary, "I thank you for this lesson, over which I shall ponder, and by which I shall endeavour to profit; and if ever it chances that I can return to you the kindness you have shown me in this view you have given me of myself, if you ever have need of my services in an extremity, you will find that I shall not hesitate to wet my feet in your behalf. Neither shower, snow, nor storm, neither heat, cold, nor darkness shall keep me from my duty in the future, if they have ever done so in the past."

Was it chance, or was it a link in the "spell," that caused the door to open just before the speaker pronounced the last sentence? Old Cupe, with uncovered head, his white wool and beard contrasting strongly with his shiny black face, stepped into the room, stood before the minister and said:

"When de yeah goes out be ready, pahson, when de yeah goes out."

"Nigger nonsense is nigger nonsense," said the "Corn Bug," suddenly becoming quiet and in a half-apologetic way, turning from Mr. Jones and addressing Judge Elford; "never mind the black fool." Then, turning to Cupe, he abruptly asked: "Did yo' bring them thare papahs?"

The negro handed him the yellowed deed, which was passed to the judge.

"Jedge," said the "Corn Bug," "this 'ere papah air ov more or less valyer, 'cordin' ter what 's written an' who wrote et. I ain't eddycated ter understand the sense ov sech things, an' don't purtend ter know what lawyers knows, an' this papah is a law papah, es any one can see by the red sealin' wax an' other marks." The judge untied the faded ribbon, deliberately unfolded the time-worn script and silently read the contents.

"Where did you get this document?" he asked at length.

"Cupe, the lazy thief, has kept et fifty years an' more among his nigger things."

"Where did you get it?" said the judge, meditatively addressing Cupe.

"Ol' Colonel, Ma'se's gran'pap, gib it ter my pap."

"Why did n't you show it sooner?"

"De sign wah not right."

"What sign?"

"Nigger sign, Jedge," interrupted the "Corn Bug." "Don't ax the fool nigger any more questions; he don't know nothin'."

Without replying, the judge carefully refolded the paper, placing it in his pocket. "I will study the document at my leisure and give my opinion at a future time," he said, after a pause.

CHAPTER V

JUDGE ELFORD'S DECISION

IN winter, time passes slowly in the country, and especially did it seem to linger while Stringtown was awaiting Judge Elford's report concerning the "Corn Bug's" deed. Each Saturday evening the circle met and considered such subjects as were of general interest to the community. At one time the party assumed the functions of a tribunal, and without any expense whatever to the participants a neighbourhood quarrel was amicably settled by the judge and teacher. The Rev. Mr. Jones read two papers on semi-religious subjects the same evening, and the second Saturday in November the teacher presented a carefully prepared essay which was discussed by the wiseacres of the circle, and listened to by the other members and a few visitors. At the following meeting the colonel — Colonel Luridson — told a story of adventure, and afterward, by way of diversion, the floor was cleared, and to the pat of Jupiter (pronounced Juba) by ole Cupe, who always attended his master, a couple of young "buck" negroes rendered a dance. These Saturday night entertainment parties drew a large audience. The subjects discussed were not necessarily of a trivial nature, although when Mr. Jones was absent much light gossip crept into place. Art, literature, politics and even science were not neglected. We were country people of simple tastes, but

paved streets, bright lights, noise, confusion, the glamour of fashion and the vanities of society are not necessary for intellectual development. Urban surroundings are not essential to discipline children for leadership in any walk, educational or commercial. But enough of this; I must pass to the record of our meeting the second Saturday evening in November, 1863, as shown by the yellowed stenographic notes of the grocer's boy, now on the desk before me.

That night the room contained a large and anxious audience, for it had become noised about that the legal document under consideration pretended to convey to the "Corn Bug" much of the land in Stringtown County. If it was accepted by the judge as genuine and legal, to many persons in that assemblage, who placed implicit confidence in his judgment, it meant the loss of accumulations of life-long toil. The full force of the disaster that would come to the community in case the floating stories concerning the document were sustained was known to all; many were the quiet discussions that had been held concerning its final effect. The lengthened deliberations of the judge had indicated that important disclosures were to be made, and this inference was supported by the fact that under his direction the county surveyor had run a series of lines about the section named in the will, and had made careful calculations concerning it. Hence it was that amid perfect silence Judge Elford adjusted his spectacles and read from a carefully drawn manuscript.

"The paper which I hold in my hand is a Virginia colonel's military warrant, and calls for five thousand acres of land, more or less. The document is in good form and was drawn up during the last century under the laws of Virginia, while Kentucky was still a part of

that territory. The boundary of the land included in this survey is exactly located as follows :

" ' Beginning at the great boulder over Clear Spring, thence east to the blazed road in Fowler's Valley, thence north to the fork of Bear's Creek, thence west to Fowler's Valley, thence south to the starting-point.' Now, Fowler's Valley passes diagonally through this territory, and the description is otherwise in exact conformity with the present landmarks, known by the same names. Since a line run by the county surveyor at my request demonstrates that the land embraced in this military claim covers about five thousand acres, there is in my mind no doubt but the survey is authentic. However, a discrepancy involving many acres would not discredit the title, for the early surveyors of Kentucky made no allowance for hills and valleys or for unequal surfaces, and, indeed, owing to the abundance of land, cared little about precision of survey, taking care only that enough was given. For example, one Kentucky patent, cited in a recent court decision, which called for four thousand acres, actually embraced over nine thousand acres ; and some lands, as many persons have found to their distress, have been granted by patent two or three times. These old military titles have always been a source of great trouble in Kentucky, and purchasers and settlers have found themselves continually confronted with the fact that their possessions had been previously granted to others or were claimed by others.

" In order, therefore, to overcome this confusion and to establish clear titles, corrective legislative acts were passed from time to time, first by Virginia and subsequently by Kentucky. In 1796 it was laid down that adverse possession of the land for a period of twenty (20) years constituted ownership and completed the title

However, no blanket law of this description can be equitable, for in many cases large tracts of land were actually stolen by virtue of the opportunity that the mischievous law created; and in 1851, the following corrective act was passed: 'An action for the recovery of real property can only be brought within fifteen years after the right to institute it first accrued to the plaintiff or the person through whom he claims.' Legal contests by reason of these surveys and legal enactments have probably cost the landowners of Kentucky more in the aggregate than the entire realty of the Commonwealth is worth.

"Now, under the twenty-year possession act of 1796, the tract specified by the warrant under consideration, were there no exceptional circumstances, would have been outlawed long since and the warrant of Colonel Hardman would have no value whatever; but certain conditions peculiar to this case, considered in connection with the amendment of 1851, render it questionable whether a court of equity would not sustain the claim of the heir. True, Mr. Hardman has never held possession of the land, but his dispossession has been from no fault of his own, and his father was in the same predicament. His grandfather, the old colonel, located the land properly, obtained a military warrant for it and recorded this warrant, as I find, in the Virginia Land Office, where the fact slumbered unseen. He placed the document in the hand of an irresponsible party, instructing him under certain conditions to give it to his son at a certain time. This was not done, but, instead, the paper was handed to another irresponsible party, and has now turned up after three-quarters of a century.

"The old colonel could not foresee the course the paper would take; the son knew nothing about the docu-

ment, neither did the son's son, the present heir, who presented it to me at once on its discovery. The deed has not been neglected by any responsible party; the inheritors, in ignorance of their possessions, have lived constantly on other possessions that lie adjacent to part of the land described, while strangers have profited from its use. The question is, will the court dispossess those who are now in possession in order to give the rightful heir his just inheritance, or will the court take from Mr. Hardman a property of which, through no act of his own and no intention of his ancestor, he has been deprived these many years? In my opinion, the land should in equity revert to Mr. Hardman, but we have here an extraordinary condition that can only be decided by the Court of Appeals."

The judge ceased, and silence such as seldom fell over the members of the circle ensued. Perhaps each man was waiting for his neighbour to speak; perhaps all alike realised the significance of that momentous power resting with the court of last resort. Then Mr. Nordman, the old gentleman from above Stringtown, arose and moved toward the door, but stopping a moment, without any display of emotion, remarked: "Ther comes a time, Judge, when a piece of cold iron is mightier than the law; and if this old deed takes in my land, I now warn all within hearing that I will not be dispossessed. My father and mother lie in the graveyard back of my house, two children of my own sleep by their side, and a spot under the willow is marked for Mrs. Nordman and myself to rest in. I do not fancy being buried in a public graveyard, and damn me if I will be buried in another man's land. When the sheriff steps into my front gate he must come armed, suh. It will be a fair fight, and as I am getting old and

stiff, my hand may miss its mark, but if it does, I will sleep under my own willow-tree. Tell the sheriff, gentlemen, that when he comes to dispossess me of the property my father earned, he must be ready to draw a bead the minute he steps inside the gate, suh." With a courteous bow the old gentleman left the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE DILEMMA OF THE "CORN BUG"

EXPRESSIVE glances were cast around the circle when Mr. Nordman passed out, and the grocer remarked in an undertone: "I don't envy the sheriff his job; the old man shoots like a ranger. I will bet a hoss *he* don't sleep under the tree." Then the circle lapsed into silence. Many hearts were heavy over the disclosures the judge had made, and he, too, felt the gloom that settles over one who, having economised his earnings until the period of rest should come to an industrious man, finds the savings of a lifetime likely to be swept aside by a penstroke. At last the "Corn Bug" spoke:

"Jedge, I don't adzacly grasp all the pints ov yer speech, but I believe I kin see the drift ov the thing. Ef I catch the idea, this paper es ginuine, an' nigger Cupe told the truth. The land es mine?"

"That is my present opinion."

"Now let me ax a quistion, Jedge. Ef I am right, the deed calls fer five thousan' acres ov land?"

"It does, Mr. Hardman."

"The line begins at Clear Spring boulder, runs ter Fowler's Valley road, then ter Bear Creek fork, then ter Fowler's Valley cross-road, then back ter the boulder."

"Yes, so the survey records."

"Thet takes in old man Sawyer's farm?"

"Yes."

"Wall, Jedge," said the "Corn Bug" thoughtfully, "I hain't much love fer the likes ov him. There hain't no honest bone in his body, an' et goes without sayin' thet he cheated Widow Longing out ov thet very farm. Yo' see, Jedge, with all respect ter the court, the law helped old Sawyer ter steal the land, an' nobody knows et better than yourself, Jedge; but yo' need n't begin ter apologise now fer the law's wrongs, yo' would never git through. Oh, wall, the widder died in the poor-house, an' ef I hev my say, old Sawyer will trot in thet direction. By the way, Jedge, ef I am right, this deed calls fer the Humses boys' farm?"

"Certainly; their farm is near the centre of the plat."

"Wall, sense them fellers got home from college they hain't no 'count, nohow. They holds up their heads an' snuffs the air when they passes common folks. They talks too highfalutin' fer sensible folks, anyway; they puts a *mo-* on their 'lasses an' a *po-* on their 'taters an' slings on style like as though their grandad had n't worked in a deadenin'. This part of the world ain't good 'nough fer sech stuck-up people. Guess I won't care ef they hev ter move out ov this section, an' I takes et nobody else will cry their eyes out. Howsomever, Jedge, how 'bout the village? Does the deed call fer the village, Jedge?"

"Yes. Here is a rough map of the claim. This crossmark represents Stringtown."

"Wall, I declare. All these dooryard lots an' back pastures?"

"Every lot, house and barn."

"Who would hev thought the nigger knew so much. I 'll be a rich man, Jedge, a very rich man."

The judge nodded his head.

"The teacher's lot?"

"Yes."

"The tavern lot?"

"Yes."

"The two Miss Ruby's lot?"

"Yes."

"The widder's?" queried the "Corn Bug," glancing at me. The widow was my mother.

"Yes."

"Yer own lot, Jedge?"

"Yes."

"Gewhillikins! And the graveyard?"

"The graveyard, too, but not the tombstones."

"Tombstones, Jedge, ain't fit fer nothin' but sidewalks; those who wants 'em kin take 'em off my ground. Wall, I 'll be a rich man, Jedge; I kin eat what I wants ter, I kin drink what I wants ter."

The judge smiled and a forced laugh went around the circle.

"Jedge, I don't want the two Miss Ruby's lot. These girls I hev known sense they were tots. They speak sof'ly ter me, Jedge, an' et kinder makes me ashamed ov myself — when I drinks too much I don't like ter meet 'em then. Yo' see, Jedge, I sometimes drinks too much."

"So I have heard."

"Wall, et don't matter, I won't hev thet lot. Neither does I want the widder's property. Sammy," he called, "come here, Bub." I obeyed, and he placed his hand on my head and stood looking me in the face.

"Does yo' 'member the day when three boys found me layin' in the briar patch in the back paster? Does yo' know thet the other brats mawked an' called me

names, never mind what — I kin 'member 'em ef I was in my cups?"

"Yes, sir."

"Does yo' recollect thet yo' brushed the flies off my face an' put my hat over my eyes an' spread yer handkerchief over thet, an' then went fer Cupe?"

I hung my head, but my silence plainly admitted the truth of what he said.

"Go back ter yer seat, child, go back. Jedge," he continued, "I gives thet boy two thousan' dollars ter eddycate himself with. He hain't strong 'nough ter work an' he must larn how ter skin workin' folks ef he lives 'spectable. Make a lawyer, a doctor, er druggist, Sonny. Remember, Jedge, when I dies this boy es ter hev two thousan' dollars in gold an' the little girl at my house es ter hev my land an' all the rest. I adopt thet girl, Jedge. Cupe the nigger knows whare the money is, Jedge. I hev seen a few ov the gold pieces, but hev n't teched et, an' yo' must give et es I says. I war drunk once, Jedge, an' more than once, but I ain't drunk now. Yo' see, Jedge, every drunk man ain't dead er a fool, no more than every dead man er fool air drunk."

"Better make your will in writing if you want it to be legal," said the judge.

"Now, Jedge," the "Corn Bug" continued, as if he had not heard the remark, "the teacher hev done a pile of good hereabouts. Ef I had known what war best fer me an' lis'n'd ter Cupe I would hev been eddycated too, but thare ain't no use in all ov us tryin' ter be smart. Thare must be some gentlemen an' some workingmen in the world, thare must be some eddycated people, an' some who don't know nothin'. Et ain't the man who knows the most who air happiest, an' et ain't the man who hev done the most good who gits the soft seats ter

rest in. I hev n't done nothin' fer nobody, an' I don't desarve nothin' from nobody, an' here I finds a loose plantation. The teacher hev taught a pile of larnin' ter others an' made lots ov folks rich who hev used his larnin', an' he hain't got nothin' but a house an' lot; an' ef these law fellers in Frankfort, who don't care a damn fer either ov us, says so, he's ter be kicked out an' I' m ter git the lot. I don't want his lot though, an' I won't hev his lot, an' I don't want yer lot, Jedge, either. But the tavern, Jedge, the tavern."

"Well?"

"Thet 's the place fer me, fellers. I never b'l'eved thet I could git a chance ter live in a tavern; thet's the next thing ter flyin' through Heaven, Jedge. Howsomever, thare es somethin' ter say on t' other side ov every quistion. Ef I gits rich an' lives in a tavern then I kin git all the licker I wants. Ef I gits all the licker I wants, I will drink so much licker I won't hev sense 'nough ter know when I wants licker. Ef I don't know nothin' an' I won't ef I lives in a tavern, I can't want any more licker, an' I would es soon be dead es not ter want licker. This air a tough quistion, Jedge, fer sech a feller as I am ter conumdrate.

"Now, es ter the graveyard. What good will a graveyard do me? I hev stood with my hat off in thet graveyard in winter an' in summer watchin' buryin's. I hev seen mothers cry over their babies an' hev seen children kneel 'round the graves ov their mothers. I hev a graveyard ov my own behind the cabin, an' thet's 'nough for me. I never wants ter own a public graveyard. It es hard 'nough, Jedge, ter hear people sobbin' on their own property, an' ef I should own thet town graveyard I would feel es though all those cryin's ov orphans an' sobbin's ov mothers were 'round me. I 'd

dream 'bout 'em in the night, an' I 'd be afeard ter even drink 'nough ter git happy dreams, fer a man who has licker-dreams air very sensitive an' must hev a clear conscience. He muss n't hev any devilment in his mind ef he air in his cups, else he dreams ov snakes an' sech. Besides, Jedge, I kinder don't know 'bout the vartue ov the law when et comes ter the graveyard case. Ef a person don't own the six feet ov ground he lies in, what does he own? Et don't seem es ef the Lord would bring men an' women inter the world an' grow 'em ter full size without givin' 'em land 'nough ter hold their bones. I kinder feels thet et air a farce fer a feller with five thousan' acres ov land growin' up in briars an' persimmons ter say he owns the six feet ov ground his dead neighbour lies in an' who don't want no more than six by two. Guess, Jedge, the lawyers kin keep the graveyard fer their fee; they won't give me all this land fer nothin'; they hev n't no feelin's neither, an' won't care ef the graveyard their neighbours rest in es ploughed up.

" Jedge, I ain't talkin' altogether ter yo' now, but am arguin' ter myself es well. Yo' see, Jedge, while I don't cast no reflections at nobody, still I likes ter talk ter myself. Thare ain't no harm in thet. Old Squire Slickum always talked out loud ter himself, an' he wa'n't no fool either. One time I asked him what he did it fer. Yo' see, Jedge, I am given ter the same habit, an' I kinder wanted ter git an argument ready in case some fly-up-the-creek person asked me consarning the sarcumstance. The Squire said thet he talked ter himself fer three reasons. First, he liked ter talk ter a smart man, an' second, he liked ter hear a smart man talk. I hev forgotten the other reason, but et don't make no diff'rence. You-all won't take no offence at my excuse, an' I only asks yo' ter 'member thet I tells this

story es[1] an excuse, fer et air dangerous ter say out loud ter others what one thinks ov lawyers. A man air never sure ov keepin' out ov their clutches. They air after everybody. Ef a fellow hain't got nothin', he wants what some other feller has got, an' pays a lawyer ter help him git it, an' the lawyer never renigs. Ef he has got somethin', he has ter hire a lawyer ter help him keep et. Et air funny, Jedge, ain't et, thare air only one sure winner, an' thet air the lawyer. I am talkin' at random ter myself, Jedge, an' don't mean nothin' personal."

"I know that you do not reflect on me," replied Judge Elford, "and I am aware that many attorneys do disreputable things in the name of the law. However, Mr. Hardman, were it not for the law, honest men would be the prey of designers. Take this case of your own as an example; in my opinion, the Court of Appeals will dispossess me, a man of law, of my life savings, and, were I on the bench, and your case before me, no self-interest would influence in the least my decision."

"I ax yer pardon, Jedge," said Hardman, "I war talkin' at random. I war not thinkin' ov the good yo' lawyers do, but ov the bad. I sometimes fergits the good things what happens, but hangs onter the other side, an' thet air the fault ov other people es well es myself."

[1] Pronounce the *s* as *z*.

CHAPTER VII

"THE BEST OF THE DEVIL AND THE LAW TOO."

THE "Corn Bug" paused for a moment, and went on with his rambling talk, which none present cared to interrupt, knowing that he had some object in view that could only be discovered by allowing him to finish in his own way.

"Ef thet air deed air legal I will be a very rich man, maybe too rich. Somehow, p'r'aps et air possible fer a feller ter be too rich. But ter the pint; ef this paper (holding up the deed) is correct, Jedge, I will become a landlord an' own all this corner ov the country?"

"The law allows it."

"Every lot in the village?"

"Unquestionably."

"Every farm inside these lines?"

"Every wood, field, orchard, and garden."

"Jedge, all these people will have ter pay me rent?"

"Yes, or you can expel them."

"Widders, orphans, storekeepers, tavern-keepers, school teachers, preachers, poor people, rich people?"

"Yes."

"I won't hev ter work. I kin just put my hand in my pocket an' take out a dollar when I wants ter?"

"Well, it looks that way."

"Now, Jedge, what right hev I ter this land? What hev I done thet et should b'long ter me?"

"The law will give it to you if the Court of Appeals so decides."

"Jedge, I hain't done nothin' on the tract, an' these other people hev cleared the land, burned the brush an' ploughed up the roots. Mr. Nordman told the truth, et ain't mine, law er no law."

"The deed of your grandfather carries the land to his heirs."

"Wall, p'r'aps yer law is powerful 'nough ter make et right, but et seems es ef et helps steal. I guess, though, I ain't ter blame fer the law's mistakes, an' ef the land es mine, why ov course I must obey the law.

"Lord, folks, but I kin live high. P'r'aps et ain't best to live too high either. Sometimes now I lives too high an' sings too loud an' talks too much. Guess I hev talked too much ter-night. Ef I hev my pocket always full ov money, Jedge, won't I treat the crowd an' won't I punish the eggnog! I'll be rich, awful rich. I'll hire a clerk ter collect rents; I'll sit in an office an' count money. Et must be awful satisfyin' an' elevatin' ter count money all day. I'll wear store clothes on week days an' eat sardines, an' drink mint julips every day in the summer, an' eat oysters an' drink eggnog every day in the winter. I'll build my office next ter the tavern. This paper hev raised my calculations high, an' I hev kinder been arguin' an' enjoyin' myself out loud. Thare air two sides ter every quistion though, es you hev said more than once, an' I hed better look a minute at the other side.

"Jedge, I hev lived in this neighbourhood fifty years comin' next January. I hev worked on week days an' rested on Sundays, an' hev lived es well as I desarved ter do. I wears warm jeans clothes an' I never suffers with heat er cold, lessen I am in my cups an' lays out.

You-uns all earned yer homes an' farms an' yo' owns 'em, law er no law. I don't want ter throw any ov you-uns out ov the homes yo' hev saved, an', Jedge, yo' know thet the city man who once threw the widder an' childern inter the snow said thet rich men air ter be pitied fer they hev ter make rules they don't like thet bears hard on some people. One ov the first ter go would be the Widder Drew. She can't pay no rent; an' the next would be the orphan Ruby girls, they hain't got no money. I know a good many other people in the village who can't pay no rent — the Lord only knows how village people do make a livin', an' rich men like I am goin' ter be can't make no 'lowances. Either pay up er git out. Take yer house off the lot. The flesh is weak, Jedge, an' I am afeard ef this deed turns out ter be good, I will make rich man's rules first, an' shake han's with the law second, an' go ter the devil third. My conscience will be ruined, Jedge; the flesh es powerful weak. I don't do nobody no harm now; I works an' sleeps an' eats an' drinks an' hev a clear conscience. I eats what I wants when I kin git it, an' pays fer what I drinks, an' am happy, an' ain't carin' fer nothin' ner nobody.

"An' this here paper," holding up the deed, "is the dockyment what makes you-uns all this trouble, Jedge?"

"You understand its import."

"An' makes me rich?"

"The richest man in the county."

"Ain't thare no copy?"

"No."

"Comreds, et would be pow'ful fine fer a feller like me ter wear store clothes week days, an' eat sardines an' oysters when I wants 'em, an' drink eggnog all the winter and julips all the summer. Et would be glorious

ter git even with them Sawyers an' Humses an' a few other skinflints an' stuck-ups. But I can't afford no disgrace ter my conscience. I don't want ter turn widders an' orphans out ov their homes; I can't take rent money fer lan' I did n't earn, an' yet et 's an awful temptation ter the likes ov me."

He opened the deed, looked at the red seal, carefully folded it and tied it again, stroked it lovingly, half thrust it into his pocket, turned toward the door, then reconsidered, came back and drew the document out again. "Et air an awful temptation, Jedge, ter the likes ov me. I tastes the eggnog now an' smells the julips." Then he stood meditatingly and silent.

"Jedge," said Mr. Hardman, at last, "I hev got the best ov the devil an' the law too, an' you-all kin go home an' sleep. The village ain't mine, law er no law, an' I ain't a-goin' ter help the law steal. I gits drunk with my own money, which ain't no harm ter the likes ov me an' don't hurt no other feller ner the Lord either, but I never intends ter buy nothin' fer myself with the money I 've squeezed out ov widders an' orphans, an' I don't intend ter let the law make me a thief first an' a wretch second. Folks, I hev downed the devil, an' the law, which taken together air mighty hard fer a man ter do. I don't intend ter hev no fam'ly disgrace, an' I don't intend ter steal nothin'. Fellers, old man Nordman won't hev ter shoot the sheriff."

He opened the stove door and thrust the dry document into the blaze. A flash as of tinder, a puff, a twisting, blackening paper, and then — ashes. Those about drew back in amazement.

"Yer kin go home an' sleep, folks," said the Corn Bug turning from the stove, "thare ain't no copy ter disturb you-all, an' thare ain't no tavern, sardines, eggnog

an' julips fer the likes ov me. Come, Cupe, come, we don't live in the hotel no more; it air gittin' late, it air rainin', an' the mud air deep b'twixt here an' the cabin."

The "Corn Bug" opened the door, and together with old Cupe stalked out into the darkness.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STORY OF THE COLONEL

NEW Year's Eve, 1863, had been set apart by the Village Circle as a special holiday, the intention of the members being "to see the old year out" and listen to the reading of a special paper by the pastor, Mr. Jones, which was to be replied to by Colonel Luridson. The "Corn Bug" had "taken sick," as the doctor expressed it, the morning after the meeting mentioned in the preceding chapter, and his illness proved to be serious. Too obstinate to care for himself, the eccentric fellow neglected medical aid, and acute pneumonia, a common fatality in many parts of Kentucky, had followed, quickly succeeding an ordinary cold.

Thursday, December 31, 1863, dawned warm and sultry. The thermometer registered seventy that morning, and about noon a heavy mist settled over hill and valley. This was followed in the afternoon by a drizzling rain that sifted down in fine particles, which sopped the grass and stuck together the pendent dead leaves always clinging, during soft weather in mid-winter, to the lower beech limbs.

In the evening the members of the Stringtown Circle met according to expectation, but owing to the storm many of them were detained and straggled to their places. The "Corn Bug" alone was finally absent: as has been said, he lay dangerously ill in his humble cabin. The grocer's boy sat, as usual, behind the counter, ready

to take notes in shorthand on a quire of white paper such as is used for wrapping tea, and I sat on a stool beneath the hanging lamp, just back of the favored members of the Circle. Silence fell upon the persons who first presented themselves: a shadow seemed to hang over the Circle.

The reserve was finally broken by Chinney Bill Smith, a bearded man, who vowed when Fort Sumter was bombarded, never to cut his hair or whiskers until the South was free. This man regaled the Circle by relating the story of "the mother of Sam Hill's wife's sister," the story teller being typical of more than one person well known and popular in the commonwealth of Kentucky.[1]

From the humorous sketch of Chinney Bill Smith it was apparently a long step to the dissertation which followed, an essay on storms, delivered by Prof. Drake. Yet it was characteristic of the Circle that it could pass with relish from one extreme to the other.

At the conclusion of Professor Drake's essay, the evening being not very far advanced, Judge Elford addressed Mr. Jones.

"Pastor, it is your turn now. Let us have your promised essay on Death, to be answered by Colonel Luridson."

The pastor arose, threw his long hair back from his forehead and mildly remarked: "Before beginning to read I will say that the title does not always clearly define the contents of a book; and while my paper deals with the subject of death, its caption is 'The Life Line.'" Then in a slow, deliberate tone, quite in con-

[1] This story was a monstrous exaggeration, quite humorous and yet threaded with satire and irony. Although a welcome diversion in its place the author believes it better to exclude it from this book.

THE Stringtown grocery
where the Village Circle met

trast to that of bald, spectacled Prof. Drake, the essayist read on uninterrupted and without pause until he reached the closing sentence: —

"Let us think, then, of the end point of this drama. Since none can foresee just when the tread on the life-line will falter, let us accept that it matters little whether in the morning or the evening it be that we take the awful plunge. To-day, never to-morrow, loosens our hold of earthly problems."

Then raising his eyes from the paper, he glanced first at Judge Elford, who, immovable, made no response, then at Prof. Drake, who, leaning his head on his hands, gazed intently on the floor. Then his questioning look passed without response successively around the circle, from one to the other, and finally rested again on the face of the colonel, whose part it was to answer the essay. Standing alone, gazing intently at the upright colonel, the parson folded his arms across his chest and deliberately said, looking directly into Luridson's eyes: "Do you know, my friend, you who are to reply to this essay, do you know when you or I will loosen our hold on the life-line? Are you prepared for the end of the game of life?"

What play of thought sped from man to man as the eyes of these two met cannot be told in words, but could be felt by those who caught the meeting of those eyes. 'T is not when steel meets steel, nor when flint meets flint that the fire flies, but when steel meets flint. Perhaps none present realized that such opposites were face to face.

For a second neither moved. The parson held the unfinished essay in his hand, while the colonel stoically chewed his quid of tobacco, apparently indifferent to surroundings. Suddenly the latter, looking the tranquil

parson in the eye replied as if impelled by a mental question exacted from him by his opponent:

"You can put your paper away, Mr. Jones," he said. "I have heard enough and am ready to say my speech. Pahson, no preacher ever told the truth bettah than you have told it. I look fierce, they tell me, Mr. Jones, but I am very tendah hearted. I would n't cause a shivah of pain to man, woman, or child, and I would n't hahm even a snail. You use words too big for me; I can't answer you aftah the same style, but, as old General Haydon, of Virginia, used to say: 'It don't mattah much about the grammah so we get the sense.' I reckon, Mr. Jones, that I kin tell a story about as well as you kin, but I can't talk in a general way as you do about unseen things. I must relate something about what my eyes have looked at; I can't sling in high-toned words either: but if any man undertakes to beat me in stating plain facts 'bout what he knows, you kin bet, suh, he has got to speak straight. Folks can undah-stand Richard Luridson without a dictionary.

"I agree with you, Reverend, when you say that no fellah knows just when he is going to hand in his tickets, and to all of us the thought of death is damnably unpleasant. My heart is tendah, I 'll swear to it gentlemen; I ain't to blame if my beard is stiff. The heart of a hard-shelled turtle is as soft to the touch as that of a mouse, suh. Once when I shot a wild pigeon, an innocent little bird, and picked the creature up, it turned its little head towards me and looked me in the eye. What cause had I to take that small life? a life sacrificed for a mouthful of black meat? Pahson, you may believe me or not, but that was a cruelty my tendah heart throbs over yet. But I ain't a coward, Mr. Jones; there is a distinction between brutality and bravery, and

when it comes to a fight I am always on hand. I have seen pious-like men of the church, more cruel than I am. I have known deacons who kneel in the 'Amen' corner, hunt all day Saturday with a gun, seeking a covey of harmless quail, and shoot them down like flies, — take the lives of these helpless creatures that nevah insulted any man; and the next Sabbath these same pious fellahs sit in church trying to look like angels while the preacher reads out of the Good Book, 'Thou shalt not kill!' I am a consistent man, Judge," continued the colonel, "I don't pertend to be religious, but I *do* claim that I am consistent; and while my heart is very tendah, as I have admitted, yet no man dare insult me."

"While you were reading your sober rigmarole, Pahson, I wah thinking off and on of a case in which I wah consarned in ole Virginia, and jest when you stopped and looked up I had reached the p'int where I seized the gullet of the critter; and as you lowered the papah and looked me in the eye, it seemed as though that same young fellow's face rose up befoah me. But pshaw! what's the use of thinking about things that hev passed away? That fellow brought his punishment on his own head."

The colonel lapsed into silence and stared at the stove.

"Tell us all about it, or let Mr. Jones finish his essay," requested the clerk. "Go on with your story," urged a chorus of voices. "I relinquish the field and beg you to oblige us," added the parson, in a slightly ironical tone.

"Wall, since that day I hev n't talked about the episode, fer, as I hev already told you, there ain't no use in worrying over the troubles of another fellah, especially if the other fellah is dead, and it don't do no good, either, to think about the mistakes that other people hev

made, and that there fellah made the mistake of his life then and there. The blunders of dead people should be fergotten."

Again the speaker paused. The eyes of the judge and the teacher were fastened inquiringly upon the parson, who now seemed out of place, yet preternaturally calm. "Continue your narrative, Colonel Luridson," he said coldly; "you have said that you are not a coward."

"I hev kindah gloomy feelings to-night and can't tell a story quite as well as I should," resumed Luridson, casting a black look at the parson. "Once, ovah in ole Virginia, I wah walking along a meadow path smoking a cigar, thinking of nothin', as most people do when they are smoking, when suddenly I stopped just as I was about to step on a great black snake stretched in the walk. I raised my heel and stamped the head of that sarpent into the earth. I am sech a soft-hearted fool, that I can't look back at that display of brutality without shuddering. Not fer the snake; no, I hev killed hundreds of sech varmints, but fer a little baby snake that I then saw stretched beside the mothah — a little innocent snake not longah than a pencil. That night there was a rain-storm, and I 'll swear, gentlemen, that I lay awake an hour thinking of the poor critter perishing. I am a very tendah-hearted man and am not to blame if my cheek is rough."

Evidently the vain braggart was loth to describe the event of "honour" that he had unwittingly introduced.

"The story, please," quietly insisted the parson.

"Wall, it is not much of a story, aftah all, and I kin give it in a few words. I s'pose you admit, Pahson, that back in ole Virginia there is more honah among gentlemen than there is in other places, and begging

pahdon of the persons present, more gentlemen to the acre. It don't require book learning in ole Virginia to make a gentleman, neithah does book learning make a gentleman anywhere, 'though, as a rule, it does no harm; but, as you know, ole Virginia turns out gentlemen of both kinds, gentlemen bohn and gentlemen learned. I b'long to the first class of gents, which, begging pahdon of some of the persons present, I considah the highah class."

"The *under* class," remarked the parson drily, "know something about your type of gentlemen. But we are all impatient to hear your 'episode,' as you call it. We know you are a gentleman, but are waiting for the story."

"Wall, suh, a gentleman of old Virginia, of the first class can't be insulted. If a fellah attempts to insult him, either the fellah dies or the gentleman dies. In either case no dirt sticks to the gentleman, fer his boots air on. You see, pahson, there is another phase of the mattah when it comes to the question of honah, a phase that common people, low-bohn people, cannot raise themselves into. The highah strung the gentleman, the easiah it is to affect his honah, and to a high-strung man the smallah the reflection the greatah is the insult. Only persons of the highah order can comprehend this fact. Now, up North," and Luridson turned directly upon Mr. Jones, "where the finah qualities do not appeah, where a gentleman is nevah bohn a gentleman, insults air taken that in ole Virginia would be remembered to the third generation. Colonel Clough of my county killed the grandson of the man who insulted his grandfathah. Not that the colonel's grandfather did not kill his man (fer he did), not that the colonel's father did not kill the man's son (fer he did), not that the son of the

man the colonel's father killed had done anything personally to injure the colonel (fer he had not), but because every killing of that family done by his descendants raised the honah of the ole colonel. There hev been twelve men shot with their boots on by the descendants of Colonel Clough, and I saw four of 'em bite the dust. You bet that family proposes to keep untarnished the honah of the great colonel."

Once more the equivocating speaker faltered, and once more Mr. Jones, as though determined to compel the delivery of the promised narrative, said in a low, insistent voice:

"Your own story, colonel, your own story."

"Wall, it ain't a long story, and it ain't the only episode of the kind I hev experienced. I can't see why I think of this one jest now, either, fer I hev been engaged in others more exciting, but you seem to drive me to it. There wah, fer example, jest aftah I became of age, a disturbing character in our parts who went around insulting persons generally by asking questions about their affairs, but he knew well enough who not to insult. He nevah but once touched one of the bohn gentlemen of our county, and nevah again did his tongue wag about any one. This is how it wah; one day he met one of our niggahs, and in an impudent sort of way asked a question concerning our family. Now, Pahson, our family affairs air not the public's property, and when that niggah told me of the impudence of the inquisitive person, it meant pistols, and it wah pistols. It wah n't my fault that he would n't shoot, and stood like a mummy with his pistol in his hand looking at me when ole Tim Warman counted three; and I guess as he felt the sting of the bullet that let out his heart's blood, that he wished he had n't asked the niggah of a bohn gentleman whether

his young mastah had reached home safely the night he drank too much licker and raised hell in the village. It ain't safe to question niggahs about their mastah's affairs."

The Virginian here turned his eyes away from the parson, who now stood as if he were an antagonist, determined not to let him escape.

"Why do you evade your duty?" he asked lowering his voice. "Are you a coward, Mr. Luridson? Your last episode, not your first."

Fire flashed from the colonel's eye; he cast a quick glance at the parson, who with folded arms stood facing him, and then, as if respecting the cloth of the man of God, or subdued by that placid gaze, he turned his eyes toward the ceiling.

"The last affair to *this* date you mean, Pahson, not necessarily the last one. No man knows when he may strike a quarrel, any more than he knows jest when he may slip off the tight-rope you were preaching of," he replied, leering in a sinister way at the parson. "You want my episode, and you seem to want it bad. Now you shall hev it, and I call these gentlemen to witness that you forced me to relate it. I'm not ashamed of my record, nor afraid to make a clean breast of it, but I hev done all a gentleman can do to save trouble, and if trouble comes it ain't my fault.

"This is the way it happened:

"I hain't much schooling, but I hev enough to ansah all the use a bohn *gentleman* has fer book learning. I went to school until I could read the newspapah and write a fair letter, and then I found it useless to spend more time with books. I did n't intend to write a novel or edit a dictionary, and I did n't propose to fool away my time on matters that were of no particular value to a

gentleman of leisure, so I dropped school and turned my attention to foxes and dogs.

"Wall, that ole schoolhouse stood until this war of secession came, honerable as a schoolhouse should stand; but aftah our forces retired and the Yankee lines were advanced beyond us, the house was disgraced by this damn Freedman's Bureau.[1] You would n't believe it if a gentleman like myself did n't certify to the fact, but a Yankee wah sent to our section and a niggah school wah started in the very house where I had carved my name on the bench. Gentlemen, a *niggah* school."

"Well," said Mr. Jones, "tell us about the '*niggah*' school."

"There ain't much to tell, fer it did n't last long. A meeting of neighbourhood gentlemen followed, and I wah delegated to direct that Yankee to close the doors and leave the country."

"Well?"

"I laid the case befoah the young man who taught the school, and one word led to anothah until, finding that he wah determined to persist in his offensive course, I told him that he must either close that school or fight."

"And he fought you?"

"No. The long-haired varmint had n't spunk enough to fight; he turned his back, said insolently: 'Scuse me, please, but I hev this duty to perform,' and shut the doah in my face."

"And you —"

"Kicked the doah down, seized the stripling by the throat and squeezed his life out. I did n't intend to kill the boy, fer he wahn't moh 'n half grown; but aftah I got my clutches on his throat and thought of the insult

[1] The Freedman's Bureau was established in March, 1865.

he had given me and saw a niggah's face behind my ole desk, I grew desperate, and when I threw him onto the floor his face was as black as the skin of the niggahs around him."

"And then —"

"Nothin'. I wiped my hands on my kerchief, called my dogs and left the fool niggahs and their cowardly teachah. I had done my duty. I had given the Yankee and the niggahs a lesson, and I don't hev no squeams now over the episode. If he had been a bohn gentleman I would hev shot him in his tracks; but as it wah, I choked him as I would a varmint. Nothin' but a coward is ever choked to death. Perish me, if any damn, long-haired Yankee shall insult Colonel Luridson."

"What was the man's name?"

"Jones, suh, Jones. Same name as youhself, Pahson, a very common name," he said with a sneer, "and a very ordinary man, suh."

Mr. Jones stood for a moment as if unconcerned: no change of facial expression, no movement bespeaking unusual interest in the subject so abruptly ended. Then he spoke in a soft, low tone, so sweet and mild that it is strange his voice could be heard through the roaring of the storm that now suddenly flared up — as if the closing of the story had been the signal for its tumultuous onslaught.

"See," he said, "the clock points to twelve. The New Year is upon us;" and as we turned our gaze upon the face of the clock, one by one the husky gong struck, each note of the asthmatic cry quivering hoarsely until the next peal came. At the last stroke the parson dropped upon his knees. "Let us pray," he murmured. The building trembled in the tempest, the hanging sign squeaked and cried as it flapped back and forth, the wind

moaned and sung through the stove pipe, the shutters banged to and fro, but all were unheard by those who unexpectedly were called to listen to the sweet, solemn prayer of the man of God.

He prayed for his suffering country, now in the throes of civil war; for the people of the colonel in Virginia; and his brave countrymen in the Southern army; he asked blessings on the community in which he, a man of the North, then chanced to dwell; also on his own people at home, and prayed for his own brethren in the trenches. Before closing he asked God to forgive the last speaker, who, a self-confessed murderer, stood unrepentant; and finally he murmured a prayer for the soul of the unsuspecting boy-teacher who, in cold blood, had lost his life by the hand of the murderous colonel.

Then, without rising, Mr. Jones took his note-book and pencil from his pocket, and, resting his hand on the soft cushion of his vacant chair, carefully wrote a few sentences in it. Rising, he tore out the leaf and handed it to the village clerk, who was also secretary of the church. "Read," he said solemnly, "read aloud, and then present it to the trustees."

"*To the Officers of the Stringtown Methodist Episcopal Church.*

"This, my resignation, is to take effect at once. No longer a teacher of the Word, no longer a mediator for others, I must ask others to pray for me, a sinning suppliant.

"Osmond Jones."

Then, standing erect, he faced Colonel Luridson, who, undaunted, returned his look with a defiant scowl.

"Pahson," said Luridson, "Pahson Jones, were it not fer youah cloth I would make you eat the insult you hev jest given me — me, a Virginia gentleman. At youah request, I told this story to please this com-

pany. You hev called me a murderah, suh — me, a gentleman of honah, suh. I will not stand the insult, pahson or no pahson — prayer or no prayer. You took advantage of youah cloth, and you shall eat youah words, or by the bones of my grandfather you will sing youah next song and breathe youah next insulting prayer in — "

" Check your wrath," interrupted the parson, without the least excitement. " Listen to me. You have told your story; now I shall tell mine. If you are a brave man you will not flinch. I have heard your words, and you are bound to listen to what I am bound to relate, and which, notwithstanding the task you have imposed upon me, I shall tell as deliberately as you have spoken."

CHAPTER IX

THE STORY OF THE PARSON.

"INSCRUTABLE Providence has led us together, Colonel, me from the North and you from the South. That we are both of one honourable people is evidenced from the fact that from Bennington and from Saratoga, to the moss-clad Southern glades where Marion camped, our ancestors fought for a common cause, freedom for the white man. Shoulder to shoulder your ancestors and mine faced the same enemy, each patriot ready and willing to die for the land he loved, a land dear alike to North and South. Nobler men never lived than our forefathers, Colonel; for while yours, on the verge of starvation, were fighting in Virginia, mine, half frozen and with empty stomachs, were battling in New England. Thank God for the patriots North and South, who gave us a country of which both have great reason to be proud.

"You have given your version of an affair in which you participated, you, a descendant of a Revolutionary hero who served and died with Washington. You selected what you consider the proper method of righting a fancied wrong, the manly way to maintain the 'honour' of your distinguished grandfather and yourself. Now, I will give the history of the man you killed, who, like yourself, was a descendant of a soldier who faced the British enemy, and fell near where now stands

the monument of Bunker Hill. Notwithstanding your different methods of life, neither you who live nor he whom you killed can be considered the descendants of cowards."

Either the speaker's voice had insensibly fallen, or the storm without had increased in violence to such a degree as to overcome its low murmur. The words were scarcely audible, and as the last sentence was spoken a pause ensued in which one heard only the shrieking of the frantic wind.

"There are good reasons, Colonel Luridson, why men cannot see life's duties exactly alike; and while I freely overlook your extravagant ideas of personal honour, it is a pity you cannot have equal charity for the views of my people. You were reared in the South, I in the North. Your land is balmy and pleasant most of the year, mine cold and cheerless. Your soil is easily cultivated and productive of great returns, our land is hilly and covered with granite boulders, around the bases of which men search with the hoe to find a nest here and there for a few grains of hard, yellow, scrub-flint corn. Your winters are so mild that stock scarcely seek for shelter, and your herds graze in open air the year through; our winters are so long that when spring comes the entire crop of the summer has been consumed in feeding a very limited number of animals. You became the heir of plenty by the result of that battle for freedom, in which both our ancestors served so valiantly, while it brought to us only a barren heritage. While you have been free to roam at will, watching for fancied insults and cultivating belligerent passions, I have been compelled to work unremittingly, and thus our distinctive environments have created our different views of life. Each of us should in consequence have forbear-

ance for the other. I had to gain a livelihood, and was forced to spend the results of my little savings to secure the education necessary for the ministry, while you were provided for by the property you inherited, and were not obliged to labour."

The parson was interrupted by the grocer, who, ever mindful of his guests, stepped forth and heaped the fire with coal; the long-legged clerk, who had never before been known to move the relic of a chair on which he sat, actually broke the record and hitched it toward the stove. Mose, the Jew — patient, pleasant Mose incapable of sarcasm or hatefulness, even when his people had been abused by idle-mouthed Gentiles, and whose face had never before lost its smile, now drew his nail-keg seat a foot forward, even edging himself into the circle of Gentiles.

"Is n't this a fearful night to be on picket duty? God help our exposed brethren of the North and South," said Professor Drake. There was no reply, and the eyes of the spectators turned again to the actors before them. The colonel, now pressing the preacher to the climax, as the preacher had previously done to him, said:

"Let 's have the story, Pahson, not an oration about our common pedigree. I don't catch the connection."

"The story you soon shall have, sir; I wished to show that you and I may each revere the memory of the other's ancestors. I wished also to remove the stigma you have tried to cast over the man you killed, and to say, Colonel, that your honoured ancestor fought for his country, as thousands of noble Southern soldiers are now doing, and as Colonel Luridson is *not* doing. Your ancestors of Revolutionary fame did not choke stripling lads with pens in their hands in behalf of falsely imputed insults, sir."

Involuntarily the colonel's hand sought his back pocket, but as he made the movement two members of the Circle sprang to their feet. The parson waved them back.

"Shame, shame, Colonel!" he said calmly, "I have n't even a pen; besides, I have not told my story; you are bound in honour to listen patiently to my story."

"Then be quick about it," said Luridson savagely, and be careful of youah words, or I won't promise fer my temper. Jest now you came near going to the other Jones, and ancestors or no ancestors, cloth or no cloth, I warn you not to rile me ag'in."

"I was born and reared in New England," continued the clergyman without noticing the insult, "where men, women, and children must work for their living, and I assure you they consider it honourable to do so. I was the elder of two boys, and much older than two sisters. Our little home nestled at the base of a mountain spur, within a short journey of the ill-fated historical Willey House, and there, hidden in a nook that even tourists seldom find, the days of our peaceful child life came and went. Before our cottage stretched a small meadow, through which wound a clear brook fresh from the birch-covered mountain in its rear. One corner of this meadow was a garden, and included also a small rye field, which gave us our dark rye bread. We had not much beyond the necessities of life, but we were happy. We roamed the mountain side Saturday afternoons, caught fish in the brook and helped our father till his little fields. In winter evenings we cracked nuts, ate apples and listened to our aged grandmother's stories of wolves, Indians and of the revolutionary wars; during winter we attended a neighbourhood school. You never beheld such scenes as we sometimes witnessed there;

you have never ploughed your way to school through waist-deep snow nor slept in the garret under the clapboards and waked to find the snow sifted in furrows across the coverlet.

"Such environments teach us to love one another more dearly, bring us closer together, strengthen family and neighbourly ties, make our joys a pleasure to others, and move others to mourn with us in sorrow, bind human lives into one, give to us faith, hope, and charity.

"You spoke of the fine sense of honour that exists among your people, but, my brother, could you have been schooled, as I have been, to think of the sorrowing friends, the mourning wife, children, or sweetheart, and the agony with which love looks into an open grave, your 'tender' heart, which bleeds at the recollection of a dying baby snake, would not forget its tenderness and gloat over cold-blooded murder in behalf of wounded 'honour.'"

As in harmony with these pathetic words, as if to impress their force upon that little circle, at this point the building trembled more violently than ever, the storm's fury seeming even to bend it out of its upright position, and, springing from its seat on the topmost shelf, a glass fruit jar shivered into fragments on the floor directly between the two upright men.

But the cry of wind and crash of glass were unheeded by the spell-wrapped actors who stood facing each other, and the audience began now to realise that these two men were personally concerned in both the story the Virginian had told and that which the parson was relating. The colonel was stoically gazing into vacancy. "Thus," continued the parson, "my boyhood days were spent until my brother grew to manhood, and my dear sisters were in the early bloom of maidenhood; my

aged grandmother, with her stories of the long-ago, had gone to eternal rest, and my patient, loving mother, like a guardian angel, moved quietly about the house, thoughtful of all but herself, typical of thousands of New England mothers who forget themselves in their plodding life-work. I 'm thinking now of a typical New England winter, during which there was never a thaw after the opening snow flew; every day after November first the frost crept deeper, every night the cold grew stronger, and when the days began to lengthen we had already experienced winter enough for the whole season. It had been decided long previously that I should go to an academy to study for the ministry, and each member of our family had scrimped and saved for years, in order to gather together the necessary means. My devoted sisters had even spent several summers as dining-room waiters in a neighbouring mountain hotel, adding by this sacrifice their earnings to the family hoard. But God moves in mysteries; the week after New Year's Day my father was kicked by our horse and instantly killed. We were drawn to the churchyard by the same horse; and as we bowed our heads about the open grave, Colonel, the snow which had been shovelled aside stood on a level as high above the earth's surface as the pit before us sunk beneath it. Next day the winds swept back the snow drift, and a cloak of pure, unruffled whiteness told that God conducted the close as well as the opening of that drama. God was with me then, but God only knows, my brethren, whether the hand of Providence is with me now.

"We returned to our desolate home and spent as best we could the remainder of the sad winter; but with returning spring and the cares of the sugar bush our sorrow abated, for the duties of life cannot be thrown

aside even at the behest of grief; and he who best serves his Creator looks not backward, as you yourself have said, Colonel. Realising that I had no chance now for my contemplated education, my ambition was thrown aside, and the usual life cares were resumed. How long this ran I cannot say, but long enough to give me many heartaches over withered prospects. Still, the unexpected often happens. Friends, you cannot imagine the joy that followed the reception of a precious letter. Our Congressman, unbeknown to us, had interested himself in our behalf with the Freedman's Bureau; my brother received by mail a great envelope marked 'Official,' and in it came an appointment as — school-teacher — in — Virginia."

The Colonel, whose gaze had been riveted upon the ceiling, shot a quick glance at the speaker; evidently he had anticipated the closing information, and after the sudden start he stoically resumed his former position. Mr. Wagner stopped whittling; Professor Drake, uncomfortable, busied himself in straightening the edges of a pile of books; Judge Elford grimly chewed his quid. The pastor stood motionless a moment, apparently lost in thought, then he slowly took his note-book and some papers from an inner pocket and handed them to Mr. Wagner, saying: "Please mail these to-morrow to the address inscribed on the fly-leaf of the book."

At these words Luridson turned half way toward the wall, and drew his half-closed hand from his hip pocket; an object could be seen in its palm which glistened like a bright bar of iron; a click followed, the hand returned the gleaming object to its former place, and the colonel stood immovable before the pastor.

There was a lull in the wind without at this juncture, and taking one step towards the colonel, the pastor

continued, in a soft, tremulous tone: "Need you be told what followed? A telegram, a sobbing mother, distracted sisters, brother on bended knees, alone, in an attic room, registering with God an oath to revenge the infamous crime and not to relent until the murderer had been brought to judgment. Since that day Heaven has kept me from encountering the slayer of my brother. The fellow fled, Colonel, and you know, brave as you pretend to be, that he who stands before me now is a fugitive from justice and fears to go back to his Virginia home; neither does he dare to let his honourable Virginia countrymen know his hiding-place. You have discredited your ancestors, you are shaming the brave Southern soldier, and have no claim on the glorious mother of States, Virginia."

The Colonel made a quick motion, as if to strike the speaker, but Mr. Jones calmly held out his open hand, and in response to the silent command Luridson resumed his former position.

"Long," continued the pastor, "I struggled to overcome my wrath, vainly struggled to forgive, and at last I vowed that while our Master kept us apart no intentional act of mine should bring us into conflict; but if God Almighty led us to each other I would consider that it was by His will, and for a single purpose, and — the hour has now come."

The hand of the colonel sped toward his hip pocket, but not so quickly as the pastor's arm sprang out, for as springs the tongue of a lizard, too rapid for eye to follow, so sprang the pastor's arms; and as a quivering sparrow gives one glance of despair, and one only, when falls the unexpected shadow of the hawk upon him, so gave the colonel one upward turn of the eye; and as the talons of the fierce bird of prey, crunching through

bone and flesh, creep into the vitals of the death-struck bird, so crept those finger-ends into the tissues of the colonel's throat, closing the throbbing arteries beneath, damming up life's crimson's current until, under the pressure of the fluttering heart, blood flowed from mouth, nose, and ear, and the very eyeballs turned purple.

The teacher sprang forward, so did the judge, but too late; the crime had been committed in the space of a a breath; taken by surprise, they could give the unfortunate man no help; the pent-up hatred of years had been concentrated in that fearful grasp. That wild throwing of the arms, gurgle indescribably horrible, attempted swelling of the breast, instant blackening of the face, frightful upturning of the eyeballs, followed by the rush of blood from the mouth and nostrils, were sights that haunt me yet.

As falls an unclasped garment in a heap, so sank the Colonel, dead upon the floor.

Folding his hands upon his breast, the pastor addressed Judge Elford: "A murderer has gone to judgment, a murderer is born for judgment: I give myself up to the law."

Paralysed, stunned with horror by what they had witnessed, the members of the circle stood like frozen figures, motionless and dumb around the erect parson and the fallen braggart. How long I know not, only I am sure that from my place in the rear, where I had crept close to old Mose, I saw the amazed group stand aghast, staring first upon the slayer and then upon his victim.

Next I beheld, as in a dream, that the village doctor raised the head of the vanquished man, tore open the garments covering his chest, loosened his collar, placed a hand upon his breast and kneeled expectantly for a

brief period, then with a shake of the head slowly arose and pronounced the word, "Dead." "Strange," he said, "that a single squeeze like this should be followed by death. I have seen men choked until the tongue hung out of their mouth, and yet they revived. There is no evidence of life in Luridson, however: the shock must have burst a blood-vessel in his brain."

The witnesses of the drama now regained their self-control, the palsy passed, their minds were liberated from the stupefying spell, and simultaneously several men stepped forward. In silence the dead colonel was straightened out upon the floor and covered with a strip of muslin torn from a bolt. A messenger with lantern in hand was dispatched for the village undertaker, and old Mose volunteered to perform the errand. During this period the pastor stood silent, with downcast eyes; the judge sat apparently apathetic, and, obeying a common instinct, the members of the circle automatically resumed their usual places, waiting for the end of the strange New Year celebration. I, however, against my will, now that the old Jew, Mose, was gone from my side, found myself crouching, shivering next the stove, near Osmond Jones, the preacher, who alone was standing. Seeing me, he reached down and placed his hand gently on my head.

"Child," he said, "would to God you had stayed with your mother to-night."

CHAPTER X

THE FEARFUL STORM OF NEW YEAR'S EVE, 1863

THE calm which had subdued, for the time, the usually active and sometimes boisterous proceedings of the villagers was in impressive contrast with the wild uproar of the winter tempest. The storm raged, if possible, with increasing violence in the utter darkness around the building in which lay Colonel Luridson's stark corpse, surrounded by many who watched, but no one who deeply mourned. The judge at last rose, and was about to speak, for the very silence had become oppressive, when the door of the room was flung open, and old Cupe, the faithful slave of the "Corn Bug," with the incoming blast burst into the midst of the company. Dazzled by the brightness, he stared about the room, and it could be seen that he was benumbed and suffering with cold. His garments were covered with ice, his beard was hidden in frost. Catching sight of the physician, neglecting the bright stove that must have seemed so grateful, he impulsively exclaimed:

"Quick, Doctah, quick, Ma'se am dyin'; he wan's yo' too, Pahson; quick, Pahson!"

The doctor went to the door, stepped outside, returned, and closed the strong valve against the blast.

"Not this night, Cupe. A man would freeze before he could find the cabin."

"Yo' mus' go, Ma'se Dock, yo' mus' go, fo' nebbah will Ma'se lib till mahn'n'."

"I will not go this night," said the doctor emphati-

cally. "It is better for one to die than that two should perish."

After a period of silence the negro's self-possession was restored, and he became again the garrulous Cupe, prone to argue regardless of the importance of the message to be delivered.

"Et doan make no diff'ence nohow," he muttered, "dah ain't no use in a doctah when deff comes a-walkin' in. Niggah signs am suah, but doctah stuff am unsahtin. De sign am not t' be disembayed. What fo' did Cupe walk absent-minde' like inte' de house t'-day carryin' an axe on his shouldah?[1] Did n't Cupe know dat sech a sign mean' suah deff t' some pusson, an' fo' de Lawd, de debbil make him do dat awful ting. An' when Cupe t'ink ob de awfulness ob de transaction an' step back t' lebe de room, dah settin, in de op'n doo'way wah dat dawg Dgawge; an' he jest look up in Cupe's eyes es sah'ful-like es ebah a dawg could look, es ef he say t' his old frien', 'Cupe, yo' hab gone an' done it, suah.' An' then when Cupe cotch de awfulness ob de 'stake an' look down at Dgawge quistionin'-like, de dawg raise his head an' open his mouf an' howl long an' skeary-like, lookin' all de time in Cupe's face es moanful es de young missus in de big house on her dyin' bed look, in de long-ago. God save Ma'se, dah am no 'scapin' de aftahcomes ob sech signs es dese. De sign in de ashes de night dat de boy come out er Bloody Hollah done pinted t' Ma'se dead dis New Yeah night. De axe sign t'-day done say he gwine t' die, an' den de dawg what set in de doo'way an' howl am de sartin sign ob deff, case he see deff com'n'! But de su'est sign ob all"

[1] To carry an implement of outdoor work into the house was a sign of death. To such an extent was this believed that the artist who sketched the portrait of old Cupe could not prevail on him to enter the house with the hoe on which he is leaning.

(and Cupe's voice became yet lower and more measured), "de su'est sign ob all am dat de cedah tree limbs what Ma'se planted am es long es a coffin now — Cupe measure dem ag'in t'-day. Yo' kin stay heah, Doctah, dah ain't no use in yoah stuff nohow ef deff am in de room. De signs what nebbah fail am pintin' t' sahtin' deff, dah ain't no good in doctah's stuff now."

Having thus disposed of the doctor, the messenger turned to Mr. Jones.

"Ma'se wants de preachah. He hab not ax fo' de doctah; he say: 'Cupe, go fo' de pahson, I mus' see de pahson.' An' den Cupe say, sed he: 'Ma'se, did yo' make frien' wid de pahson like ole Cupe say t' do?'

"'Shet up yoah black mouf an' go fo' de pahson, an' doan wait too long, fo' I feel pow'ful weak-like,' say Ma'se, an' he give Cupe sech a look as t' say dah ain't no time t' lose.

"An' de face ob de dead missus rise up, an' Cupe heah de words ob de promise he made dat sah'ful night t' de honey chile what am an angel now. Den he say t' Ma'se: Ma'se, I swear t' yoah deah muddah dat nebbah de weddah should be too hot an nebbah too cole fo' Cupe ter sahve de chile Heaben sent t' her, but dis am de las' time ole Cupe kin sahve yo', Ma'se,' and den Cupe lite out an' heah he am. Ma'se Preachah, yo' will go, suah yo' will; de sign mix yo' an' Ma'se Honey up wondahful-like."

The preacher hesitated, but not from fear of the storm. He looked at the sheet that covered the lank form of the colonel, then replied, speaking more to the audience than to the negro:

"I am not a minister — but — a murderer."

The negro gazed at him in wonder, then following the parson's glance, he stepped to the sheet and raised it

cautiously, far enough only to give a view of the face of the colonel, and started back with staring eyes.

"Fo' de Lawd, Ma'se Preachah an' did yo' slew de colonel?"

"I did."

The negro's self-composure returned immediately.

"Who 'd ob b'lebed it, Ma'se! An' yo' so weak-like. Yo' am a bettah man dan yo' looks t' be, Ma'se Preachah, an' ole Cupe knows yo' sahved him right. Go t' Ma'se Hardman, nebbah mind the colonel."

The preacher made no reply.

"Doan David slew Gliah," Cupe continued: "doan de Lawd slew de wicked Belshazzah, doan de people slew Stephen in de name of de Lawd an' doan yo' slew de wicked colonel case de Lawd want him killed?"

The parson looked inquiringly at the judge.

"Parson," responded the judge, "your resignation has never been accepted by the church. You are yet legally a minister. The church must accept the resignation you wrote in order to consummate the act."

"But the murder?"

"That point remains to be established. If this case comes to trial, the evidence may show that you acted in self-defence. If I am not mistaken the colonel cocked his pistol while you were still talking and standing defenceless with both hands exposed. He half drew his pistol before you grasped his throat. If I am correct, he now holds a loaded pistol in his hand. Let us see." And raising the sheet, the judge carefully drew the colonel's right hand from its resting place, where it had fallen partly covered by the coat, and with it came a tightly clasped pistol.

"I saw him draw the pistol," said I; "it caught in his overcoat's lining and got tangled up."

The judge regarded me curiously. "Do not forget what you saw, child." Then, turning again to the minister:

"Another second," he said, "and you would have been a dead man, Parson; self-preservation is the first impulse; you were unarmed and had made no aggressive motion. You did your duty, Mr. Jones, and did it bravely; the case is self-defence; and, whatever may be true of New England, you need fear neither judge nor jury in Kentucky."

Still the parson hesitated.

"Go!" said the judge in a tone of authority, pointing to the door; "humanity calls."

Drawing his overcoat tightly around him, without speaking a word, the parson moved to the door, opened it, and passed out.

"De end am not yet," said old Cupe, speaking to himself; "de sign pinted t' two men dead dis night, but de colonel wah not one ob dem. Heah am one what de sign miss. Am de sign wrong? Fool," he murmured, "fool nigger, not t' know dat two deffs could n't come alone in de face ob sech signs. Ef et am moah dan one, et am not two, et am free er seven er nine."

"Do you remember what the 'Corn Bug' said to Mr. Jones the last time they faced each other in this room?" asked the teacher, heedless of Cupe's mutterings.

"Yes," said the judge.

"I have it written," interrupted the grocer's boy; turning to his stenographic book, he read: "'You have n't the spunk of a sick rabbit and you have n't the energy of a sleeping possum; you would n't cross the street in a shower to save the soul of a saint, and you would n't dare crook your finger in the face of a turtle-dove for fear it would get pecked.'"

CHAPTER XI

INTO THE STORM PASSED THE MINISTER

WHEN the door of the grocery closed behind him the pastor paused, turned, grasped the door-knob, and stood with his back to the storm. Insensible now to external things, he did not feel the raging cold outside the room he had left, and gave no further thought to the glowing warmth within. He dropped upon his knees and raised his hands in supplication; then, rising, he drew his hat firmly down and strode out of the feeble light which struggled through the window.

He did not think of the course he should take — there was no path that night. He did not reason his way — no power of reason remained. His mind was wrapped in despondency, his spirit was lost in anguish so deep that this hurricane, the maddest storm American history records, was unnoticed and unfelt. There is no other explanation of the part he took that night. To have attempted thought concerning surrounding things would have been fatal to his errand; to have reasoned would have lost him the way. Under such conditions and in such blackness to look for roadways, to seek familiar objects, to attempt to guide one's self by the intellect, would be to walk in circles, turn here and there, stagger like a drunken man, stumble, fall, and perish. The man did not care to see the way. Sensible neither to

the cutting hail, the shrieking blast, nor the intense cold, he ignored that king of storms. Leaving the Stringtown pike, he struck into the fields and moved on. As if it were a balmy autumn day, and the breeze simply fanning the cheek and cooling the brow, as if life's pleasures were before him and happy thoughts behind, he strode onward. Presently he turned aside; something he neither saw nor felt blocked the way. A herd of swine huddled together crushed one another, each seeking to creep beneath the others, striving to press nearer to the centre of the heap, vainly trying to escape the piercing cold that all night long crept through and through from beast to beast, until, when morning broke, not one remained alive. Scarcely had he passed them by when close beside him a mournful cry sounded; but the wail of anguish did not catch his ear nor did it sound again, for it was the last cry of some hapless beast that, struggling, had fallen helpless, and would not rise again. Caring not for man nor beast, the pastor moved onward, guided by he knew not what, toward a light he did not see. Over hills, through the woods, across frozen creeks, climbing fences, jumping gullies, seeking neither path nor road, he sped.

At first the shooting hail stung the skin, leaving little indented spots, but the sense of pain soon ceased beneath the quieting touch of benumbing cold. At first, the wind had waved the flowing hair that encircled his brow; but soon the beating hail and congealing frost had matted it together and frozen it to his skin and coat. At first, his arms and his fingers moved freely; but they rapidly grew insensible to pain or touch and finally hung stiff and motionless. The man knew nothing of all this, knew not that the creeping cold was nearing his vitals; little cared for life or death.

At last the pastor's eyes were greeted by a slender ray streaming through a little window near the door of a cabin. He tried to raise his hand and grasp the door-knob, but could not. Both arms were numb. He shouted, but the cry was lost in the roar of the blast; he listened, but no answer came, only the tumult of the sweeping storm. Again and again he cried, and then in desperation threw himself against the door, crushed it in, and fell forward into the room. He tried to rise, but his hand could give no response to his will; his fingers rattled against the floor; his arms refused to bend. By chance, he pressed his heels against a crevice in the rough-hewn floor, then he raised his head, next his shoulders, and finally, as a worm creeps up, his body rose, and at last stood upright.

Edging along the wall, he reached the swinging door that now slammed in and out obedient to the whim of the varying blast, and pressing his weight against it succeeded in closing it, even to the snapping of the catch. Just then the flickering flame in the great fireplace flashed upward, lighting the room.

The cabin was built of unhewn beech logs. The spaces between the logs were chinked with stones and the interstices had been filled with mud. In the ceiling was a square hole to which a ladder reached; the floor was puncheon. At one end of the oblong room a chimney-place covered much of the area. A window opposed the fireplace, and another was cut beside the door. The hearth was made of a single, large flat fossil stone from out the creek bed. On that stone stood an iron oven, a few kitchen utensils, and in the huge throat of the chimney hung a crane to hold the kettle or suspend the roast. The furniture of the room comprised a small table, a few chairs and a bed. On the wall

hung a brace of horns, a couple of guns, some arrows and a powder flask and pouch that once had been in service. All this the pastor saw as the fitful fireflash glimmered; for the quickened intellect of the man whose life, resting on the edge of one world did not reach yet a foothold in the other, comprehended quickly all that rose before his gaze. To the dying pastor time was precious, and a single flash carried to his brain what, under other circumstances, might have remained long unseen.

Then he fixed his gaze on the wan visage of the "Corn Bug," who stared back again from the coverlets of the bed; — a face in which only two great eyes and a stub nose were visible, for a mass of tangled beard and matted, unkempt hair covered all but the staring eyes and whiskey-dyed nose, while the body of the wretched man sank back.

The man was not alone; for Mr. Jones saw another form in the shadows, half reclining, half sitting on the opposite side of the bed — the form of a child, a young girl with dishevelled, flowing hair. She seemed to have been startled from sleep by the intruder, but she made no movement and asked no question. And still beyond these two, on the hearth, in the edge of the chimney, so indistinct that it was a question whether it were a shadow or a substance, he caught sight of a sombre tracing that resembled a human being, and yet seemed not altogether human — a dusky mask that seemed thrown before and yet might have been a part of a form behind.

The flickering fire started up and sank again, the shadows played in dissolving waves about the room. The wind without, in unison with the dancing shadows within, rose and fell, singing strange songs, which

verberated through the many half-chinked crevices of the logs.

Never had the New England Parson heard the play of the wind at midnight in a house of logs, nor had he ever gazed at such a scene as this. In that Kentucky land, man nor child had ever taken part in such a drama, nor, after that New Year's Eve, 1864, has any man heard such fiercely wild wind music. The two men gazed long at each other, but both held their voices.

The child broke the spell, and it is well that she did so, for the men seemed unable to utter a word. Each seemed to have transfixed the other; neither had the power to move. It was a nightmare spell, and as in a nightmare the life may flee before the body can be induced to move, so, had no living being spoken, the spell that held these men might have ended as nightmare sometimes ends.

Impulsively the little girl threw her arms about the form of the bedridden man, and then she laid her fair, chubby cheek against his rough beard, keeping her eyes riveted on the face of the silent parson. She stroked the matted hair of the uncouth man, and, searching with her face beneath the shaggy moustache, sought to kiss his lips. Even the suffering parson could but contrast the holiness of dawning childhood and the horrible repulsiveness of self-wasted manhood.

The child spoke pleadingly, as she toyed with the uncouth visage: "Uncle, uncle, speak to me, Uncle Hardman;" but the dying sinner, released from silence by that voice, spoke, not to her, but to the man.

"Come here, Pahson, come here. I ordered Cupe ter find yo', an' the brack rascal did his duty; he said he would send yo' ter me, an' he did. Wall, Pahson, bygones es bygones. I riled yo' once, Pahson,

but I did n't mean half I said, yo' see, Pahson — come closer — we who air bad hev a kind o' hatred fo' yoah kind, jest 'case yo' air good an' we air bad; there ain't no other reason. An' when the corn-juice gets hold ov us we say cussed things we always half feel toward the like ov yo', but don't always speak. Wall, Mr. Jones, I asks fergiveness now, and aftah yo' does what I wants yo' ter, then yo' must kneel down, an' pray fo' — come closer, Jones. I ain't strong now an' I can't speak loud. I swore at yo' once, Pahson, an' said yo' dare n't wet yoah shoe soles in ice water; yo' hev beaten the words back."

Mr. Jones moved slowly, painfully across the floor. The girl in fear clung closer to the sick man; the parson saw by the nearer view that the child was very beautiful, and also by that nearer view perceived that the man became more hideous.

"Pahson," continued the sick man, "in a trunk in the loft above es money, gol' an' silver — a fortune. I hev seen some ov et, Mr. Jones, gol' es there. Cupe says my grandad captured et from a British paymaster an' hid et in the chist; but et don't make no diff'ence wha' et came from; et ain't safe ter ask quistions ov any dollah. All I own, land an' money, all but two thousan' dollars, the girl must hev; write et down quick, Pahson, write et down."

"Where is the paper, pen or pencil?" Mr. Jones asked.

"I hev been raised with the niggers an' by the niggers, too. Nevah had no use fo' papah an' pencil."

"Then I cannot do what you wish," said the parson.

"But yo' must do et; did n't the jedge say the night I burned the deed that I must make a writin' will? Ain't this child ter be taken care ov an' the boy ter be

given money ter edycate him? Yo' must write et down, Pahson," he pleaded; "the end ov the nigger spell es here, the nigger spell thet linked yo' an' me tergethah, Mr. Jones, an' yo' must write. I can't talk no longer, fo' I am very tired."

"I left my note-book and pencil behind me; I cannot."

"Can't you write on a slate, mister?" asked the girl; "I can."

"She can't write; she knows her letters, but calls makin' pictures writin'," interrupted the "Corn Bug."

"I can write, and I 've got a slate full of writin'," protested the child.

"Where is the slate?" asked the parson; "give it to me quickly."

The child ran to a corner of the room and returned with a slate to which a pencil was attached by a string. "There, mister, see the writin'," and she pointed to the child drawings with which one side of it was covered.

But the parson could not use the pencil; his fingers refused to obey his will; he was helpless.

"Write," said the "Corn Bug," "write, Pahson, er I will die without makin' my cross. See, mahn'n es comin', et es daylight now, an' Cupe's nigger sign said thet with this mahn'n's light I would die. Quick, Pahson, I want ter make my cross."

By an effort Mr. Jones pressed the slate between his wrists. "Make your letters, child, as I tell you to do." And obedient to his command, she slowly spelled, letter by letter, word by word, the shortest will on record in Stringtown County, to which as witness the pastor managed to sign his name. "Now for your cross-mark."

The dying man seized the pencil, and as he did so

the old crone arose, and advancing from out the chimney jamb (for she was the shadow), stood over him and said, partly as an apology, partly to herself, "I'se a nigger, but ef signin' ob papahs am t' be done, I wants t' see de makin' ob de cross. Cupe, he say, 'Dinah, doan yo' nebbah let no signin' ob papahs be done by Ma'se lessen yo' sees de makin' ob de cross.'"

With the negro crone on one side and the child on the other, the "Corn Bug" made the cross; and then his partly relieved mind reverted to the future.

"Would yo' pray fo' the likes ov me, Pahson?"

But the parson, too weak to rise, near to eternity as was the "Corn Bug," shook his head, and murmured, "I cannot, I dare not."

"Can't you pray, Mr. Preacher?" asked the girl; "why, I can say the prayer my mother left me."

"Pray for both of us, child," murmured the parson with a last effort. Kneeling upon the puncheon floor, with her little hands clasped and her child-like face turned upward, the girl interceding for the dying profligate and the wretched murderer lisped the simple prayer:

> Now we lay us down to sleep,
> We pray thee, Lord, our souls to keep;
> If we should die before we wake,
> We pray thee, Lord, our souls to take.

But neither of the men heard the end of the touching invocation; before the words were hushed the spirits of both had broken their bonds and followed the message to the bar of justice.

. . . . . .

The morning light suffused the room, the break of the bitter cold Friday morning, January 1st, 1864. The rising sun's rays paled the fire-flash; the shadows van-

ished ; the wild winds subsided, and excepting the biting cold without and the frozen creatures scattered over all the land, no evidence remained to tell of the storm which had come and gone. When the door of that lonely cabin was opened by the searchers — for searchers started from Stringtown with the break of day — they found the negress hovering over the embers on the hearth, folding in her embrace a sleeping girl. In the rude room, on the bed one man lay, and beside the bed another man kneeled, while between them, tightly clasped in the stiff fingers of him who kneeled, a child's slate rested. Over the upturned surface of this slate awkward words were scrawled, and at the tip of the index finger of the man on the bed, him who clutched the pencil, they saw the sign of the cross.

I will to Sammy Drew, the widow's son, two thousand dollars. All else to Susie, my adopted child.

JOSEPH HARDMAN.
His ×
Witness OSMOND JONES.

CHAPTER XII

"LOOK OUT FO' DE RED-HEAD BOY"

THE spring of 1864 came and passed, the summer's sun mounted into the heavens and shone bright and hot. Nature and man seemed intent on covering and removing as quickly as possible all traces of the disastrous storm that closed the year 1863 and ushered in 1864. Twisted and broken trees sent out new sprouts, which quickly shrouded the staring scars and wounds. The balmy south loaned new songsters to lurk in thickets that had risen again from where, on that fateful night, brush and briar had been beaten against the earth. The prolific rabbit had multiplied until once more its tracks were seen in the dust of the pike. The dove and the yellow-hammer, during the cruel cold spell following the storm, had left their haunts and sought the barnyard to sit in huddles upon the fence, and feed with the farmer's fowls about the feet of domestic animals; but now again the one walked with nodding head in the pike dust, while the other pecked and thumped merrily upon the topmost bough of the dead beech in the forest. Nature in the flush of summer had forgotten the painful touch of the dismal winter; and when in the early spring men collected the scattered rails and rebuilt their fences, cleaned up the broken timber, and burned the useless brush and limbs, they too lent a hand in the great scheme of repair ushered in by the lengthening days and strengthening power of the sun's rays. Before

the month of May had passed, scarcely a memento was left to tell of the hurricane that brought distress and disaster to a continent. Still, an occasional reminder could be found imbedded in the luxuriant grass near Stringtown; bleaching bones that but for the storm of New Year, 1864, might yet have been flesh-clad, were familiar to the sight.

I stood beside Cupe in the valley of a meadow; a weather-worn skeleton cumbered the ground at our feet. Through the strewn ribs crept the heads of a bunch of young iron-weeds. The vine of a wild potato threaded the eyes of the bleaching skull; the long grass fringed about and pierced through and through the articulated vertebræ; a shin-bone with hoof attached moulded on the sward. I gave the shin bone a push with my bare foot, and a swarm of ants, uncovered by the act, scampered from beneath, each with a white larva in its mouth. I laughed aloud and beat the frightened insects with a stick; the moist earth became a pulp of struggling limbs and bodies mixed with loam, and under the rain of blows the slaughtered innocents were lost in common ruin.

The black man seemed not to observe the act; he gave no heed to my multi-crime, but mumbled over his thoughts:

"De co'ht am not fo' niggers, 'case niggers ain't white. Ef a white man am drunk an' a fool, he kin sw'ah away de life ob a nigger; ef a nigger am sobah he ain't got sense 'nuff 'cordin' to de co'ht t' tell what he knows. What 's de use ob Cupe goin' t' co'ht, an' tellin' de truf 'bout de will ob Ma'se? Cupe am a nigger, an' Dinah am a nigger too." [1]

[1] Negroes were permitted to testify in Kentucky if negroes only were concerned, but in cases where the interests of whites were affected, they were excluded.

"Dinah saw your master sign his name to the will," said I.

"But she am a nigger, an' et doan make no diff'ence what she saw; she am brack, an' de co'ht doan take her nigger talk."

"Ain't it queer about that money?"

"Dah ain't nuffin p'culiar 'bout et. De witches an' sperrits wah out dat night. Fo' de Lawd, when Cupe go fo' de doctah de ebenin' ob de storm, de gol' wah all in de chist. When de const'ble take p'session ob dat chist nex' day — dah war n't nuffin' t' be seen."

The old negro leaned over and gazed intently on the object at his feet. He rested one foot on the skull, and whispered: "Dah ain't no use in fightin' Prov'dence; de sign say dat de gol' wah fo' de gearl, an', will er no will, et am fo' de gearl. Chile, chile, de sperrits what make de sign kin carry 'way de gol'.

"Ya, ya," he added, in a hoarse whisper, "es easy es t' pint t' what 's com'n' t'-morrah; an' gloomy am de sign what pint t' Cupe an' yo'!"

He intent on his soliloquy, I absorbed in listening, alike were oblivious to the approach of two men on horseback, who, leading a third horse saddled, but riderless, having entered the field from the woods road, neared our position. A stick snapping beneath the hoof of one of the horses caused me to raise my head, but the noise appeared not to attract the attention of my companion. The old negro did not raise his eyes from the face of the skull, but in a monotonous undertone said: "Dah am troubl' fo' Cupe an' yo' too, boy; et am in de air an' am com'n' fas.' Tole Dinah t' take good care ob de Susie gearl when Cupe am gone, an' Sammy Drew, yo' *look out fo' de Red-Head Boy*."

Having ridden to within a few steps of us, one of the

men alighted, produced a legal paper, placed his hand on the shoulder of Cupe (who now for the first time gazed in his direction) and said: "By order of the Court I am commanded to arrest you, Cupid Hardman, and secure your person in the county jail."

Old Cupe made no reply. The sheriff pointed to the empty saddle. The black man's stolid face gave no evidence of emotion; unmoved, he repeated his former words in a low tone.

"Tole Dinah t' take good care ob Susie, an' yo' *look out fo' de Red-Head Boy*." Then he slowly mounted the horse. The three turned and rode away.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ARREST OF CUPE

MOTIONLESS I stood over the dismembered skeleton. Forgotten was the soliloquy of the aged negro, out of mind his story of the past. To a child the name of the law is sacred; in a boy's mind an officer of the law stands exalted, above and beyond the ordinary human. Slowly the three men on horseback receded in the distance, while I gazed at them with hand-shaded eyes. Their horses walked with downcast heads through the long meadow grass, but when the fence that bounded the woods-road was reached and the bars were "put up" a brisk pace replaced the walk, and soon the figures disappeared. Neither of the men cast a look backward; not even when waiting for the dismounted officer to replace the bars did Cupe give a glance in my direction. Just before their forms vanished in the shadows of the drooping beeches a melodious howl arose in the distance — a cry that one who has heard the notes of a Southern darkey's dog can appreciate — and all was still again. Then, and not until then, did I move, but as the three passed into the depths of the forest I turned and followed a sheep path that led in the opposite direction — across the meadow, around the neck of a tangled thicket, through a woodland pasture, where, mounting a slight hill, I came within sight of a log cabin that rested on the slope beyond the summit. Bare and desolate, the trunk of a tall, shell-bark hickory tree, with top broken off fifty

feet from the earth, stood near by, a relic of the New Year storm! A square enclosure in the garden behind the house was marked by a group of little mounds, on one of which, shaded by a cedar tree, the grass was younger and of a brighter green than on the others; these were the most conspicuous objects about the cabin.

An aged negress, her head bound in a red bandanna handkerchief, sat inside, with a child on her knee. She was combing the long, dark locks of the little girl, at the same time singing in a rasping tone a weird ditty that only persons reared by or among the blacks could have understood. Unseen, I stood silent, looking at the two figures; but my shadow striking across the floor caused the old woman to turn quickly.

"Come in off dat doah-sill! What fo' yo' dare do sech a fool ting es t' come t' a fren's house an' stop in de open doah? Yo' bring trouble on de fam'ly suah by sech actin' up."

"Yes," I said, "there is trouble, Aunt Dinah."

"Come in off dat doah-sill, I tole yo', an' took a cheer. Doan make de trouble wussah dan it am, ef dah am trouble on yoah min'."

I entered the room and seated myself on a shuck-bottomed chair.

"Now fo' yoah trouble. What am it?"

"Cupe has been arrested."

The old negress dropped her comb and gazed at me in wonder.

"Spoke ag'in, chile."

"Cupe has been arrested."

"What fool stuff yo' gibin' me? What fo' should Cupe be 'rested? De chicken house am full ob fowl, de pastyah am alibe wid sheep an' pigs, de turkey talk all day t' de grasshoppah, an' de guiney-hen cry 'pot-

rack, pot-rack ' all night 'roun' dis cabin. De bah'l ob flour an' de meal sack am full, an' de fat sides an' de hams am drippin' grease in de smokehouse. What moah do any nigger wan'? What lyin' fool wah et who 'rest Cupe?"

"The sheriff of the county."

"Lawd! Lawd! but wah it not de const'ble?"

"No, it was the sheriff."

"Fo' de Lawd, de case am ser'ous, suah! De sheriff don't trabel 'bout cotchin' niggers what grab a chicken fo' de toofache."

Gradually the gravity of the case dawned upon the mind of the old crone, but only to increase her incoherent wrath. She engaged in a tirade of abuse, questionings and jabberings in which the sheriff, the law, the liars (unknown) who had defamed Cupe, and lastly poor old Cupe himself, came in each for a full share of vituperation.

Finding myself neglected, I turned to depart; but now the negress, quieting her jargon as suddenly as she had begun, said: "Yo' mus' eat a bite, chile. Dinah mus'n' fergit her mannahs even ef yo' did bring trouble. Sit a minit an' eat a bite."

"I did n't bring trouble, Aunt Dinah; the trouble came before I saw you."

"Did n't yo' come t' a fren's house an' stan' in de open doah?"

"Yes, but that did not make the trouble, for Cupe was arrested before I came."

"Yo' doan know nuffin' 'bout sech tings an' yo' ain't golified t' speak. De doah-sill sign kin work boff ways. Ef a ting es, et es, an' fool argyments ob pussons what doan know de sign's powah can't change de fac's. Doan yo' stan' on de doah-sill, I axes?"

"Yes."

"Doan de trouble come?"

"Yes, but —"

"De sign wah workin' backward, chile; close yo' mouf wid dese wittles."

She quickly placed a dish of honey, a loaf of salt-rising light bread and a glass of milk upon the clean table, and once more I ate in that cabin which it seemed my footsteps could not evade. The girl sat quietly and eyed me; did she remember my former visit? During the repast I gave Dinah full particulars concerning Cupe's arrest.

As I arose to depart Dinah asked: "An' what word did Cupe send t' Dinah?"

"He said: 'Tell Dinah to take good care of the Susie child.'"

Dinah seemed pleased with the trust; then she whispered: "An' what did he say to yo', chile?"

"He told me to 'Beware of the Red-Head Boy,' but I don't know what he meant."

"Yo' will know some day, honey; yo' will know to yoah sorrah some day."

She leaned over and spoke in a low, guttural tone: "De day ob trouble am com'n', an' de Red-Head Boy am mixed in de ebil sign. Cupe read de omen, an' et say dat de Red-Head Boy an' Susie an' yo,' chile, am edgin' on t' sahtin deff. Et say dat de Red-Head Boy 'll die sudden an' dat yo' an' Susie 'll be de cause; an' dat yo 'll die sudden, an' dat de Red-Head Boy an' Susie 'll be de cause."

"How did he read it, Aunt Dinah?"

"He read et in de glass, de sign glass what p'ints t' de act dat ain't been acted."

"And what of Susie, Aunt Dinah?"

"De sighn wah monstrous cu'yus 'bout de gearl. Cupe read de omen twice; et wah monstrous cu'yus."

"Tell me about it, Dinah."

"De honey gearl wah alibe suah, but folks looks at her es ef she wah dead. She wah suah alibe, an' she wah dead."

"How could she be alive and dead, too?"

"Dat am what trouble Cupe. De sign say she am dead an' dat she am gone out ob de worl', but suah she am still alibe. She wah walkin' an' a talkin' aftah de sign p'int t' her bein' gone from out de worl'. Dere wah a shaddah on de face ob de glass, de shaddah ob a great big Cross."

"You 're fooling, Aunt Dinah; how could each of us boys and Susie be the cause of the death of one another? That cannot be."

"Deed, chile, I ain't foolin', et am de p'intin' ob de sign. Et can't be done, yo' say, but de sign say et mus' be done, an' Cupe say et will be done. But de omen say dat befo' de fulfilment ob de spell in de time t' come de Red-Head Boy mus' sit alone in de cabin ob Susie. Lis'en, chile; dah ain't no harm t' come till he sit all alone in Susie's cheer in de night."

Too well acquainted with the superstitions of the negroes to consider seriously this prophetic outburst, I smiled and turned to depart.

The old crone stepped outside the doorway, took me by the hand, and looked me steadily in the face.

"An' Dinah say too, *watch out fo' de Red-Head Boy*."

CHAPTER XIV

COURT DAY

STRINGTOWN is situated eight miles from the "county seat" of Stringtown County, where stood the county jail. In order to reach this important spot, the traveller from Stringtown follows the Mt. Carmel pike to Mt. Carmel Church, and then branches to the Turkey Foot road, which follows a creek bed four miles to its source. On the summit of this rise stands the village honoured by holding the court-house of Stringtown County.

Like other county seats in Kentucky, at the time under consideration this was subject several times a year to the flow and ebb of a human tide. The tide was high in Court week, but during the intermediate periods stagnation prevailed.

At the time of Quarterly Court, in June, from every section of the county, on the first day of Court week, men on horseback could be seen "going to Court." These as a rule started in pairs, or parties of three or four; but as they journeyed onward the byways merged into main roads and the isolated groups upon them coalesced until, when the village was reached, a steady stream of horsemen came pouring into its main avenue.

In this county seat, even to the very day before Court convened, stagnation ruled supreme. The two grocery stores were open for traffic between Court periods, but

attracted none but home patrons; the two taverns were ready for business, but even their bar-rooms were quiet and the long rows of shed stalls adjacent to each tavern were empty, and the horse racks in front of the groceries and the taverns were vacant. The court-house, built like a church, excepting that it was the proud possessor of a second story and four whitewashed round brick pillars in front, stood, the day before Court, with closed eyes; the iron gate was locked, the pepper-grass and shepherd's-purse grew high and luxuriant between the flat-rock paving stones, and the dog-fennel covered the edges and far into the street unmolested even about the long rows of horse racks that bounded "Court-House Square."

In the early morning, each hot summer day, a little business was done in each store; the barkeepers found occasion to wash a few glasses and bruise a little mint; the barefooted boy drove his cow to and from the pasture, and a smell of frying ham or bacon and browning corn-bread or biscuit hung at breakfast time about each residence. But as the sun mounted into the sky a universal lethargy settled over the scorching village, and not until the slanting shadows of evening fell did life reappear.

The idle sojourner might spend his time in this lazy village, and between Court periods, even to the day before Court, find nothing more exciting than an occasional dog fight, unless, perchance, it were a quarrel between the owners of the dogs.

Lazily the sun came up the day before Court; lazily the inhabitants of this sluggish village moved, when they did move; lazily the stray pig meandered along the side of the unpaved streets, picking up an occasional morsel; lazily a flock of gabbling geese waddled through the

dusty road seeking the nearly dried creek bed adjacent to the village; lazily the unshaven barkeeper, with closed eyes, sat before the inn on the flat stone pavement in his tipped-back chair. One could not easily have found a creature in this village that was not infected by the lazy sun, which, day after day, crept through the sky and leisurely sank toward the earth into the tree tops, glowing a second through the branches, seemingly undetermined whether it were not best to pause awhile upon earth's edge before dropping over and rolling out of sight.

Opening of Court day brought a change. Bustle in and confusion about the tavern. The long dining-room tables were "set" by break of day; the kitchen stove was red and furious, the negro servants moved as if they actually enjoyed motion; piles of vegetables, a quarter of beef and several boiled hams spoke of the coming feast. The freshly shaven barkeeper, with freshly filled bottles and a pile of freshly cleaned glasses, no longer sat beside the door in the tipped-back chair; he too was ready for action. The iron gates that barred the main entrance of the court-house yard were open and the windows to that "Hall of Justice" were unshuttered. Even the stray geese had moved to other scenes, the wandering pig had not been loosed that morning, and the boy had come and gone with his cow before the sun had risen. The village was awake and the very buildings themselves took on a different air — the residents were in touch with life again and eager for the coming fray. The word fray is not inappropriate, for many were the men who had ridden to this court-house on horseback and returned home in an improvised spring wagon hearse; many have been the feuds that, argued in the Court of Stringtown County's capital by the mouths of the law-

yers, have been settled, immediately after the Court adjourned, in the street by the mouths of pistols.

Men came to Court, antagonists led to enmity by some trifling incident, and grouped themselves into clusters; one clan went to Jim White's tavern, the other went to Jo Sweet's. They stood in separate groups about the streets, and scowled, but did not speak when first they chanced to meet; they visited their respective bar-rooms again, and grew surlier and thought meaner things with each uplifted glass; now they growled when group met group and looked defiantly at each other; another visit to the tavern, and when the antagonistic groups next came together their tongues were loosened, pistols flashed in the sunlight, and another "case" was made for the opposing lawyers to beat the air over at the next term of Court.

CHAPTER XV

STRINGTOWN JAIL

INTO Stringtown County Seat from the flat Creek road the three horsemen rode leisurely towards the county jail. As they passed, a boy swinging on a grape-vine that dangled from a hackberry tree near the first house by the roadside gave a yell that carried with it the information that only a country boy can put into a wordless cry. Immediately from the house a number of faces peered, some black, others white, and yet, aside from the cry of the boy, no other voice was heard. Scampering from his place, he ran after the passing horsemen, following their footsteps in the dust; the yell of the boy was repeated as house after house was neared, and a flash of faces could be seen in the windows; an occasional female form, perhaps with broom in hand as an excuse for outdoor appearance, stood motionless on the front porch; a gathering of boys thronged about the heels of the horsemen, and old Cupe, well known to every person of that village, became the centre of attraction.

Time and again had he ridden on horseback into that village unnoticed; but now, he was stared at by men and women, followed by hooting boys and preceded by snarling dogs, for each boy owned a dog, which, as his young master fell into line, sprang from cover and joined the four-footed advance-guard. Thus Cupe,

with his snow-white beard, his bleached woolly pate, his shiny, wrinkled face, his garments of patches of many colours, was ushered to the jail of Stringtown County. The troop of snapping dogs, that included in its membership every species, from a short, bench-legged fice to one gaunt coon hound, moved in front; on either side of the prisoner rode an officer of the law, while behind came the troop of urchins, black and white. The advance-guard needed no director; on they went to the blind street that led to the county-jail; into this the troop of dogs turned, and simultaneously arranged themselves about the entrance to the jail. Too well did they, dumb brutes as they were, know the ending of the journey of these horsemen. Then, amid the clustering of boys and dogs, the three horsemen dismounted and pressed their way through the gaping crowd. A heavy knocking at the door brought the "Innkeeper," who signed a paper handed him by the sheriff; the form of the black man vanished within the gloomy structure; the two officers remounted, and, leading the riderless horse, turned back toward the world without; the boys and dogs scampered after them, and the back street was vacated by every creature — with one exception. The great, gaunt, old coon hound, with lank sides, made no movement when the others departed; he stood with drooping ears and uplifted nose silently facing the door by which the negro had entered. His nostrils sniffed the air, his ungainly tail slowly wagged back and forth, his long, red tongue lolled from between two ivory incisors, and from its tip an occasional drop of spittle fell upon the earth. Motionless he stood with eyes set upon the grim door; and then, closing them, he pointed his nose straight upward, and from his throat a long, plaintive howl arose that, beginning low and weird, reached

to a height seldom heard from hound's throat, and then, descending, died away in plaintive sadness. Again the dog howled and listened; and not hearing a reply, again, louder than before, he bayed the silent door. This last appeal seemed to bring an answer, but one that human ear could not have caught. Turning from his place, the animal crossed the narrow street and carefully selected a bed of thick dog-fennel beneath a clump of wild black-currant bushes, turned "three times 'round," sinking each time lower than before, and then dropped upon the earth and curled himself into a heap, where with eyes closed, his sentinel nose pointing toward the new home of his old master, he lay motionless.

The jailer conducted Cupe to the second story of the jail and halted before one of the back cells.

"Ef et am pert'nent t' de yocasion," said Cupe, "befo' yo' go t' de trouble ob openin' de doah, de pris'nah ud ax a quistion."

"Certainly," said the jailer.

"Fo' some fo'ks dis heah room am all dat kin be 'spected, but fo' me, ef et am de same t' yo', a front room am moah t' de taste."

The jailer thrust his key into the lock.

"Yo' know bery well dat Cupe am not gwine t' make yo' no trouble, an' he doan ax no — " the negro stopped, put his hand to his ear, as if listening to a sound unheard by the jailer — it was the mournful howl of his old hound — then gave a sharp, penetrating whistle, and continued his sentence — "lux'ry. Ef de front room am empty, et won't cost yo' nuffin' moah t' open an' lock dat doah instead ob dis heah doah. A doah am a doah t' de man what opens it, but dah am reasons t' de man what rests in de room fo' wantin' t' be behind one doah instead ob 'nuddah."

"Well, I don't see what 's the use of growling at this room," said the jailer.

"De fac' am, Ma'se Kindum," said the negro, quick to observe that in getting a reply he had gained a point, "dat Cupe am not growlin' at de room, but at de place de room sits in. Ef de sunshine an' de moonlight could come into de room yo' hab s'lected fo' Cupe, dah would n't be no sort ob argyment. But Cupe hab seen de sunshine an' de moonlight all ob his life, an' he doan know jes how long a spell he 'll be heah. Yo' hab knowed Uncle Cupe sense yo' wah a chile, Ma'se Kindum; yoah chilluns know him too, an' doan knows no hahm ob him needah."

The jailer withdrew the key, led Cupe to the front of the building and opened one of the two front rooms.

With tattered hat in hand the negro bowed and courtesied as only one of the old black uncles of Kentucky could do, but his profuse thanks were largely lost upon the jailer, who without a word turned and departed.

Stepping to the barred window, Cupe remarked: "De sunshine an' de moonlight am monstrous thin when dese heah windahs am considahd, an' et am cut inter slices by de iron bars, but Cupe hain't done nuffin' t' make him afeard ob light what shine cleah in de sky er froo cross bars eider. 'Sides, he wan' t' talk t' his fren';" and pressing his sable face against the bars old Cupe gazed intently up and down the street. "Et am monstrous strange," he murmured, "ef Dgawge Wash'n't'n hab gone back on Cupe." Presently his aged eyes caught sight of a weed in the opposite fence corner that, as his voice sounded, began to vibrate as if uniform blows were being struck upon it, and peering at the clump of dog-fennel at its base he made out the curled-up form of his faithful dog, who, with beating tail, raised nose and open

eyes, was staring at the face of his master. "Yo' am only a dawg," said Cupe, "but yo' may hab work t' do, Dgawge Wash'n't'n, befo' yoah teef git dull; put yoah head down an' stop yoah tail, an' keep yoah strength ready fo' de time ob need."

CHAPTER XVI

CUPE IN JAIL

THUS the jail life of these two friends began; one contented outside the bars, chained by love to him within the cell; the other, seemingly not less contented, behind the grating. Loquacious Cupe and howling "Dgawge Wash'n't'n" both grew silent under the conditions of their fate. The negro became sullen and refused to talk concerning his "case"; and all the spirit seemed to have left the dog, who lived on day after day seemingly without food, but only seemingly, for the hound of Kentucky knows how to prowl at night. An attorney had been provided by the Court to defend Cupe, but the old darkey declined positively, although politely, to answer any question or make any statement beyond the fact that "es the Co'ht did n't git no 'vice from him t' begin wid et did n't need none t' end wid. Ef de Co'ht doan know its own business, et ain't fo' Cupe t' teach et."

"But my object is to help you."

"Then, Mr. Lawyer, yo' may es well spar' yoah breff, fo' Cupe doan need no help. He hain't done nuffin' t' be 'scused fo', he hain't stolen noh hid no money, an' he doan 'tend t' hab no 'scuses made by lawyahs fo' what he hain't done."

"But you admit that the money was stolen?"

"Yo' am de man what say so — not me. Ef Cupe

had said de money wah stolen he would help find de t'ief. But de fac's am Cupe doan 'tend t' 'fy Prov'dence. De law am mighty, but de spell an' de sign am mightier, an' yo' kin tear dis nigger's eyes out befo' he will cross de workin' ob de sacred spell. De money am gone, Mr. Lawyer, et am not t' be seen, an' et will stay gone until de sign come right fo' et t' come back."

"If the sign don't come right before Court opens, you will go to Frankfort Penitentiary, Cupe."

"Dah am honest men in de penitentiary an' t'ieves loose on de outside, Mr. Lawyer, an' yo' can't make Cupe try t' sarcumvent de signs by no sech argyment es dat."

The days passed. A few weeks would bring the convening of the Court. Not one word would Cupe say concerning the problem as to the disappearance of the money, that much-talked-about gold. At last the perplexed lawyer conferred with Judge Elford, of Stringtown, concerning the case, and that personage made a visit to the jail and appealed to the stubborn prisoner. He was ushered into the cell of his humble friend, who appeared to be very much surprised at the honour extended by the unexpected visitor, but quickly recovering his wonted presence of mind, his first act was to apologise for the barrenness of his temporary residence.

"Yo' mus' 'scuse de poverty ob de s'r'ndings, Ma'se Elford, 'case de fittin's ob de room am fo' pussons what doan keer fo' lux'ries. Ef yo' had 'nounced de fac' dat yo' 'tended t' call, de conveniences would hab been sech es de yocasion demands."

"Never mind the room, Cupe; I came to talk with you."

"'Deed, Ma'se, yo' 'sprise de ole nigger; take de cheer."

The judge seated himself in the only chair the cell afforded, and Cupe stood expectant before him.

"Cupe, your attorney informs me that you refused to give him information concerning the lost money. Now you know that I am your friend, and I have come from Stringtown expressly to advise you to tell everything you know about it."

"Yo' am my fren', Ma'se Elford, 'deed yo' is, an' Cupe hab known yo' sense yoah muddah held yo' on her knee. When Cupe first saw yo', yo' wah a baby in de ahm, an' now yoah hair am white."

"True, Cupid, true."

"An' no man in all dis county ebah say a word ob wrong 'g'inst yo', Ma'se Elford. Yo' am a fren' t' Cupe, yo' say, an' Cupe say, no bettah fren' could Cupe hab."

"Then, Cupe, do as I direct and befriend yourself."

"An' what do yo' 'vise?"

"Tell your attorney all you know concerning this matter. You are in a serious position and in great danger of going to the penitentiary for life."

"Yo' doan mean it, Ma'se Elford?" Cupe said appealingly.

"Yes, I mean that unless you tell all you know and assist in recovering this money it will be my painful duty to sentence you to the penitentiary."

"Et ain't de pen'tensh'ry, Cupe don't keer fo' de pen'tensh'ry, it am de sah'ful 'vice yo' gib. What hab Cupe done t' yo', Ma'se, fo' t' make yo' ax him t' steal?"

"Cupe!" exclaimed the astonished man, "I ask you to steal! What do you mean?"

"De money am not fo' Cupe, et am not fo' de lawyah, et am fo' de chile. De spell say so, an' whoevah bre'k de workin' ob de spell steal from de poo' chile.

Ma'se, yo' memberlec' de day dat Cupe wait on de table when yoah wed'in' wah?"

"Yes."

"An' yo' memberlec' when de missus yo' lub wah buried in de earf, he stan' by de grabe wid de strap in his han'. Yo' memberlec' what Cupe say den? Es de pahson read out ob de good book an' close de page an' raise his eyes an' say, 'Earf to earf an' dust to dust,' de shaddah ob a cloud rise sudden like, an' de great drops ob rain spattah obah de coffin lid, an' dey keeps a-fallin' while de shiney coffin case wah bein' sot down into de grabe, an' when Cupe rise up from holdin' de head-strap yo' wah lookin' inte' Cupe's face. An' den what did Cupe say?"

"'Blessed are the dead the rain falls on,'" replied the Judge. "I remember very well how you said that to me then."

"An' so do Cupe. An' when Cupe comes t' die, Ma'se, he doan wan' no ebil sign t' follow him inte' de tome."

"Of course not, Cupe."

"Ma'se, yo' 'spect t' go t' meet de sweet gearl de rain fell on when yo' kneel in de yallah dirt an' bow de head?"

"God knows I do, Cupe."

"An' what hab Cupe done dat yo' should ax him t' go t' de debbil — what hab de ole nigger done t' yo', Ma'se Elford?"

"Nothing, Cupid — nothing. I know too well your faithful heart to see you suffer as you surely must unless you assist the law in clearing up this mystery, which I firmly believe you can do."

"Ma'se Elford, Cupe kin 'scuse yo' de sin yo' ax Cupe t' do 'case yo' doan know what Cupe know an'

can't see de ebil ob yoah words; but, de gol' am fo' de gearl, an' t' dat yinnercent chile it mus' go. De spell am workin' out 'cordin' t' de sign, an' ef de law pull Cupe's arm an' leg off, ef et buhn de flesh an' scotch de bone ob de ole nigger, no word will he say t' blame yo'. Ef yo' be de jedge t' hab et done, no cry shall come from Cupe. But when yo' ax Cupe t' bre'k de workin' ob de sacred spell yo' raise de debbil t' burn de nigger's soul. De sweet missus what die wid her han' in Cupe's han', in de long day back, an' a troop ob angels, am on de uddah shore, an' when Cupe lay down an' die, an' his sperrit go t' de shinin' lan' he mus' say t' de angel missus, 'Cupe did his duty by de chile yo' left, an' he stan' faithful by de chile Susie what come in his place.' Ma'se Elford, yo' am pow'ful welcome in de present 'bidin' place ob Cupe, but ef yo' keer fo' de feelin's ob de ole brack man, doan ax him t' steal money from de orfun chile, doan ax him t' lose de sweet smile ob de deah missus what die in de ole mansion ob de long-ago. De breezes ob summer am pleasant t' a brack skin, de sunshine feel good t' de wrinkled face, but de pen'tenshry am cool, an' de nigger am used t' work, an' ef he die in de prison standin' up fo' de right ob de orfun, he will step out ob de prison shade int' de sunshine ob Heaben."

The man of law was abashed and silenced by the rebuke of the unlettered negro. He saw that no living man could influence the fanatical slave. Rising, the judge held out his hand.

"T'ank yo', Ma'se Elford fo' lis'nin' t' de argyment ob de ole nigger, but et bre'ks his heart t' hab yo' go widout takin' a drink ob milk er a drop ob sump'n'. Howsumebbah, yo' will 'scuse de barrenness ob de yocasion, 'case Cupe did n't 'spect sech comp'ny."

The days passed swiftly. The entire community

became deeply interested in the pending trial. The large sum of money that had disappeared from the iron chest in Cupe's room the night of the hurricane would have been a godsend to the attorneys, and the county as well, could it have been found, for it seemed that the "Corn Bug" had left no legal heir. So Cupe's anxious counsel strove to obtain a confession, apparently for the purpose of saving the negro from the penitentiary. "Ef de gol' am gone, et am gone, an' Prov'dence doan want no nigger t' put in his mouf," persisted Cupe. The key to the chest had been found on Cupe's person, indeed he did not deny the fact that the gold had been in his charge to the date of its disappearance, but still he disclaimed secreting the money. At last the conviction became general that, realising that his master could not live until morning, Cupe had hidden the gold before he had started for the physician on that fearful New Year night.

Immediately after the visit of Judge Elford his home was sought by the lank village clerk, who stood nearly alone in that he believed in Cupe's innocence, and so expressed himself to the judge. Elford made no declaration concerning his own opinion, but said that his every argument had been used in an endeavour to induce the old negro to disclose the location of the treasure. The judge volunteered the information, however, that Cupe most determinedly resisted every appeal to assist in clearing himself from suspicion of having committed the crime. He shook his head when the clerk asked concerning what might be the result to Cupe in case he remained steadfast.

"The evidence is circumstantial, but sufficient to convict him."

"And is there no chance?" asked the self-constituted champion.

"None," the judge replied; "at least," he added, "none that his attorney will think about."

The clerk looked up inquisitively.

"No," Elford repeated, "none that will likely be thought about." He went to his book-case, took from it a well-worn volume, opened it and laid it on his desk. Then, as if in answer to a voice calling him, put his hand to his ear and listened. "I shall return in a few moments," he remarked, and passed from the room.

There was no intimation in the tone of the judge that a connection could be drawn between the legal document he had opened and the case of Cupe. Apparently the book had been taken from the shelf with an object that had no bearing on the presence of the clerk. And yet Mr. Wagner felt that in this book was the clue that Cupe's attorney would overlook and that the judge could not honourably mention. He moved to the open volume, and glanced at the heading of the page. It was a report of a case in the Barren County Circuit Court, but the heading was sufficient for the sharp-eyed and quick-witted clerk, who needed but one glance, and then, before the judge re-entered, stepped back to his place.

No allusion was made by either man to the open book.

"Should you like to visit Cupe?" said the judge; "you know him well; perhaps you can draw from him the secret, and serve the commonwealth where others have failed."

"Yes," replied the clerk; "I shall go in the morning."

Judge Elford sat down at his desk and wrote an order.

'*Mr. Joseph Kindum, Keeper of Stringtown County Jail.*

"DEAR SIR: You will admit the bearer, Mr. Wagner, to the cell of Cupid Hardman as often as he calls, and permit him to remain with the prisoner each visit as long as he wishes.

(Signed) "J. B. ELFORD."

The clerk bowed himself out, the judge closed and replaced the book, and then sat in meditation. "It is the only chance for misguided old Cupe, who means no harm," he murmured; "God forgive me if I have done a wrong."

CHAPTER XVII

"TOO SLOW FO' A COON AN' TOO FAST FO A POSSUM"

A CURIOUS spectacle was that of Mr. Wagner, who, after his interview with the judge, made repeated journeys to the prisoner in the Stringtown county jail. Astride of a mule, his long legs nearly dragging the earth, the man of music as well as letters patiently rode back and forth. The order of the judge gave him immediate access to the cell of Cupe, and his visits were invariably of extraordinary length. Not a little curiosity was excited in the mind of the jailer, who, however, recognising that the order of the judge relieved him from all responsibility, gave himself no personal concern. The tongues of the village gossips naturally were not less active than were their minds; and every morsel of evidence, imaginary or otherwise, concerning Cupe and his secret was chewed threadbare. The case became renowned. A score of "killings" could not have excited the interest which this mystery raised. Cupe was the subject of general comment and speculation, and could he have known the remarks that were made about him he would — providing he was as vain and fond of notoriety as at that time were most of his race — have been a happy "nigger." Of these remarks, however, he rested in ignorance, occupying his time as best he could between the interviews to which he was subjected by his attorney and the visits of his friend, the Stringtown clerk.

While it is true that his counsel had been appointed

"THE abandoned Stringtown schoolhouse"

to defend him, it was no less true that this same attorney was deeply interested in uncovering the hidden gold. The lawyer's personal fees would unquestionably be greater if he could be the means of discovering the money, and his professional reputation would also be increased. So, at last, after all attempts to induce the accused to unbosom himself had failed, he decided that he would search the garments of the negro for evidence of some description, for, possibly, Cupe had something secreted about his person that might shed light upon the subject. The jailer, on being questioned, said that the only search, so far, had been of the pockets of the old slave, and that nothing was found therein save a knife and some unimportant trinkets. "I shall bring a change of garments for the old fool," said the lawyer, "and have the patches of the ragged ones ripped apart."

That afternoon Cupe heard a gentle rap on his door; a key was awkwardly thrust into the lock and hesitatingly turned. The door swung back, and in the doorway stood the youngest child of the jailer, a little boy of eight. "Uncle Cupe," said the child, "the front door downstairs is unlocked, and you can go home." The old darkey patted the urchin's head.

"De sunlight am monstrous sweet, honey, but de shade am s'lubrous, chile. Who tole yo' t' open de doah fo' Cupe?"

"I jest heard pap and the lawyer talk and say that this would be the last day you would be here, and I thought I would let you out."

"Yo' did, chile, yo' did! an' so it am t' be de las' day! Go back, honey, an' doan yo' nebbah open no uddah jail doahs; keep yoah han' off de key."

"You are goin' to have a new suit of clothes, Uncle Cupe."

"Who tole yo' so, chile? Cupe doan wan' no new clo's."

"Mr. Putter will bring them to-day, and take away your old patches."

"Take de key out ob dat doah, chile, an' hang et back on de hook yo' took it from an' doan yo' say nuffin t' nobody 'bout tryin' t' let Cupe out ob de jail, 'case yoah pap won't like t' hab yo' tole it. Shet de doah, honey, Cupe am bery comfor'ble heah, fo' de shade am good fo' de 'plexion." The negro again patted the head of the innocent little one and gently closed the door. The key was turned, withdrawn, and silence reigned again in the cell of Cupe, who stood for a time meditatively.

"An' so dey gwine t' take 'way de ole clo's, an' fo' what? Dah ain't no use in runnin' no risk, Cupe; bettah yo' fix de mattah now."

Stepping to the grated window, he cast a glance across the street. "Yo' am in yoah place, Dgawge Wash'n't'n; am yo' ready fo' yoah duty?" The dog raised his head, stood upright and cast a joyful glance at his master. "Stan' still till I tole yo' t' come, Dgawge — stan' still."

Grasping the knee of one leg of his trousers with his hand, old Cupe gave a bright yellow patch a jerk that tore it from the brown garment beneath, which, strangely enough, proved to be perfectly sound. Then he opened a slit in one edge of the patch and removed from it a tiny iron key. "Yo' is safe now, but yo' will be safah wid Dinah," said he; then he replaced the key in the fragment of cloth and rolling it compactly, tied the package firmly with a string that was drawn from beneath another patch. Stepping to the barred window again, Cupe spoke to the dog, who, expectant, stood

in the position he had assumed upon first hearing the voice of his master.

"Come heah, Dgawge," said Cupe; "yo' hab work t' do now; come heah, yo' houn'." The dog advanced slowly, until he stood with upturned face beneath the little window. "Yo' see dis heah jew'l?" said Cupe, holding the roll beneath the bars; the dog gave a low whine. "Yo' am t' carry it home, Dgawge. *Go home wid it!*" commanded Cupe emphatically. He flipped the parcel into the air, and it fell into the open mouth of the faithful friend. "*Go home t' Dinah!*" commanded his master again; and instantly the brute turned about, gave a leap that carried him to the opposite fence, the next carried him over the fence, and then he vanished in the weeds in the direction of Stringtown.

As the dog disappeared the negro turned his gaze diagonally through the grating, and caught sight of the attorney, who had just rounded the corner of the blind street. He was advancing toward the jail, and beneath his arm carried a "store" wrapped package.

"Yo' kin come in ef yo' wants t', Mr. Lawyah," chuckled the negro; "de front doah am unlocked, an' yo' need n't knock. Yo' am welcome t' give Cupe a new suit ob clo's *now*. Ya, ya," he chuckled, "yo' am a smaht man, Mr. Lawyah, but some smaht men am like some dawgs, an' caint cotch nuffin. Dey am too slow fo' a coon an' too fas' fo' a 'possum."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRIAL OF CUPE

AND so old Cupe faced the day of his trial. Obstinately he held to his illogical course to the last moment. Perverse in his determination to make no defence, faithful to his inherited and loved superstitions, careless of the effect his fanaticism might have on himself, heedless of the pleadings and scoldings alike of friend and attorney, with dogged indifference he maintained the position he had taken from the moment of his arrest. The search of his old garments shed no light on the cause of his taciturnity, and when the case was called in court the defence could offer no rebutting argument to refute the strong but circumstantial charge of the prosecutor.

When Cupe was ushered into the court room, Judge Elford, cold and solemn, occupied the chair of justice; the twelve jurymen, the majority of them white-haired farmers, each with a box of sawdust at his feet, sat owl-like in the jury-box; the contending attorneys in front of the judge frowned from opposite sides of a small table that held two piles of books; before the table rested an oblong iron chest, riveted with hammered nails that bound to its side several heavy crossed iron hoops. The hinges of this box were of hand-workmanship, and the massive clasp in front was of hammered iron.

But few witnesses were called in behalf of the commonwealth, and none for the defence. The witnesses

sat on the front bench, and, contrary to Cupe's former assertion concerning "nigger" testimony, Aunt Dinah, with the little girl clasped in her arms, sat among them. Cupe was conducted to his place in the prisoner's box, and seemed the least concerned of those directly interested in the case. All eyes were turned upon him and followed his every motion, as, indifferent to the gaze of the packed assembly, he threw himself carelessly into his chair, crossed his legs, leaned over and utilized the sawdust box at his feet, then throwing back his head closed his eyes and slowly chewed the remnant of a leaf of tobacco. Although a prisoner, the old darkey was a picture of contentment, seemingly as much at ease as a man in perfect freedom of mind and void of care might be, his mouth keeping time to his foot, that wabbled gently up and down. The case was called, the witnesses were sworn one by one, and as each gave testimony it was evident that until I arose none of them had seen the money. Then the first direct and conclusive evidence was offered concerning this treasure, and for the first time old Cupe exhibited an interest in the proceedings. I knew that my testimony was likely to be harmful to my old friend, and when the sharp prosecutor, having led me to the discovery of the old land deed, next asked if Cupe had exhibited any of the coin, I hesitated. Then it was that the foot of the darkey ceased to vibrate, the closed eyes opened, and before the judge or counsel could anticipate the words he kindly said: "Tole de truff, chile."

A sharp rap from the gavel of the judge was not enough to silence the old negro, who repeated:

"Tole de truff an' shun de debbil, chile."

And so the story of how I had seen the layer of coin in the trunk was told, the words that could only help to

sentence the old man to the penitentiary. One by one the threads of the web had been drawn by the prosecutor; the existence of the money was proven, and the facts that it had been in Cupe's charge, and that the box was locked when the key, which had then been used to unlock it, was taken from him the morning of the storm, were also laid before the jury. The astute mind of Cupe caught each thread of the testimony; he could not fail to see, when the witness bench was cleared of all except Dinah and the child by her side, that his case was hopeless. Yet he gave no evidence of despair, but with half-closed eyes sat as if his part were that of an unconcerned listener.

At last the prosecutor called the name of Dinah Hardman, who arose and advanced to the stand. Wonder expressed itself on the face of Cupe, who mumbled: "Fo' de Lawd, an' yo' doan 'tend t' let dat nigger swoah!" This was the view taken by the defence also, for a lengthy argument followed, in which the two piles of reference books were nearly demolished by opposing counsel. At last the judge gave his decision, to the effect that while the case was one in which the commonwealth was deeply concerned, still no white person was likely to be injured or defamed by the unusual proceeding. It was really a case in which negroes would testify on each side, and the Court which proposed to allow Cupe to tell his story would not exclude the testimony of Dinah.

Alas, poor Cupe! Dinah, his faithful wife, corroborated the evidence I had given concerning the incident in the cabin to the very point where I had hesitated, and then she too wavered. It is hard to force a wife to speak the word that consigns her husband to the penitentiary, and even the judge seemed to feel the injustice

of the law. He was saved the painful duty of issuing the command, however, for once again the prisoner interrupted the proceedings:

"Tole de truff, Dinah."

This time the gavel of the judge was laid gently on the desk, and he said kindly: "Speak, Dinah."

And when Dinah had spoken, all doubt concerning the matter was at an end; the gold I had testified to have seen in the chest was shown to have been in it to the night of Cupe's departure; the key had been in Cupe's possession from the time the chest was placed in his charge to the time it was handed by him to the constable.

The witness bench was now clear, the case of the commonwealth had been made out, the prosecution rested, and old Cupe's doom was about to be sealed. Nothing the defence might offer could save him from the penitentiary. He remained with head thrown back, his mouth and feet moving in unison, his guileless face as free from care as when he rested on the corn-shuck chair before his cabin door after a hard day's work in the coolness of a summer evening.

The closing words of the commonwealth's attorney — "We now rest our case" — came at last. The audience drew a long breath, the jurymen as by a single thought changed their positions, and it could have been observed that a huge plug of tobacco and the bright jack-knife of the foreman passed successively from man to man through the jury box and that without exception a liberal slice was cut from it by each juryman, all glad of an opportunity to exchange an old quid for a new one. Several persons in the audience left the room at this point, but remained away no longer than it might have taken them to go to the nearest tavern and return;

and in a few moments the lawyer for the defence arose and made his opening speech, markedly brief, in which he laid great stress on the past record of the defendant rather than on the strength of his case.

He admitted to the judge that his only witnesses would be those who would testify to the honesty of the prisoner and to his good character, and, waving his hand over the audience, he added: "I make no distinction in the personality of the witnesses, any of the gentlemen from Stringtown will serve the defence."

His plea for sympathy was adroitly expressed, but the judge ruled out all such evidence, stating that the charge against Cupe was specific and that direct rebuttal of the commonwealth's evidence would be necessary. This ruling, certainly anticipated by the counsel, left him without any defence whatever other than the statement of the erratic prisoner, who might be expected to convict himself rather than prove his innocence.

Cupe sat with closed eyes, uplifted face, wabbling foot and working mouth; but he was not asleep, for when his name was called by the clerk he rose, held up his hand and was sworn. Then occurred an innovation in the history of that court, for the judge arose and delivered a terse, unusual address to the opposing attorneys.

"The Court proposes that this witness shall be given the privilege of telling his story in his own way and without any interruption whatever from either opposing or friendly counsel. The defendant is not versed in technical terms, and might readily be led or driven to do himself a wrong if an attempt were made either to guide or disturb his speech. In the case under consideration — a very important one to the commonwealth — the object is to discover the gold as well as to convict

the thief. The evidence introduced by the commonwealth has clearly established the existence of a large treasure, but no ray of light has been thrown on its present location, and Cupe is evidently the only person in a position to serve the State by revealing the truth. He can lighten his sentence by doing so." In conclusion, the judge called attention to the fact that Cupe stood alone, with all the world against him, and that under the circumstances he must be given full liberty to speak at length; and, "if any questions are to be asked of him," the judge added, "I shall propound them to the satisfaction of both plaintiff and defence. Are you willing, gentlemen?" he asked of the two lawyers; and both answered in the affirmative, as well they both might, for neither the case of the commonwealth nor his own case could be injured by the negro.

"Cupid," said the judge, "you may speak now; tell these gentlemen all you know about this subject, and remember, Cupid, you have sworn before God Almighty to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Looking the judge in the face, Cupe removed the shredded fragment of tobacco from the rubber-like lips that covered his toothless gums.

"Yo' is bery condescendin', Jedge," he said, "t' gib an ole nigger de 'spicuity ob dis yocasion. Howsumebbah, it won't take long t' spoke all he hab t' say consarnin' de case yo' am 'nquirin' 'bout. Dese heah gem'n an' ladies what hab spoken befo' hab lef' mighty little fo' Cupe t' talk 'bout, 'less it be de ole chist, which, 'cep'n' Dinah, Cupe am de only pusson who undahstan's. Dey hab tole monstrous straight stories, dese gem'n an' ladies, an' Cupe kin sahtify t' de correc'ness ob dere statements an' et 'fords him pleasure t' say dat de truff am in dem all."

"The old fool!" the prisoner's counsel muttered. But at a look from the judge he refrained from making an open interruption.

"Begin with the last time you saw the gold and tell us all you know about its loss. Never mind what others have said."

"Wall, Ma'se, de las' time I saw de gol' wah as follahs: Ma'se Hardman wah growin' pow'ful weak de las' day ob de yeah, an' Cupe knowed dat de nex' mahn'n' 'ud see him a dead man. De signs had written dat fac' free times obah. An' den Cupe say t' Ma'se, 'Doan Cupe ask yo' t' make yoah peace wid de pahson?' and Ma'se say in his same ole way, 'Damn de pahson!' An' den he cough ag'in bery weak-like an' look so cavahnous dat Cupe spoke ag'in an' say, 'What yo' gwine t' do 'bout de Susie chile when yo' lebe de plantation fo' de uddah side ob Jordan?' An' den Ma'se look kinder serous-like an' say, 'Brung me some ob dat gol' an' let me see et ag'in!' An' den Cupe an' ole Dinah go t' de lof' an' unlock de i'on box, an' Cupe take a han'ful ob de shiny crittahs, an' brung 'em down, an' Ma'se pick 'em up out ob Cupe's han' one by one in his fingahs, an' drop each piece ag'in case he too weak t' hole de stuff. An' den he say, 'Put de gol' back, Cupe, it am no use t' me now, an' lock de box an' go fo' de pahson.'"

At this point the attorney for the defence arose and began to stride back and forth across the floor, and as he passed my side I heard him mumble, "The old fool!"

"An' den Cupe take de gol' back an' spread it ag'in in little piles all obah de bott'm ob dat chist an' pack de cotton waddin' close 'bout et."

Interrupting himself, the negro advanced to the iron box, turned the great key, raised the lid and peered into

its depths. He gently turned the box on edge so that the judge and jurymen could see its bottom, and then, moving his hand back and forth over the surface of the inner part of the chest, he repeated:

"An' Cupe spread de gol' money all obah de bery bott'm ob dis chist. It wah five pieces deep an' eb'ry spot ob de bott'm wah cubbahed wid de shinin' crittahs. An' den de lid wah put down keerfully, an' de cubbah wah pressed t' its place, an' de key ob de cubbah wah turned, an' den dat key wah tooken' out an' put into Cupe's pocket."

Cupe again interrupted himself at this point to moralise on the chest, but it could be seen that the Court was getting a straight story, one that would send Cupe to the penitentiary on his own words.

"An' yoah bott'm wah cubbahed wid gol', yo' honey ob a chist; an' wha' am yoah gol' now? Befo' de Lawd, yo' am a fren' what sticks t' de ribs." The old negro peered intently into its depths, he moved his bony fingers lovingly over the bottom and fingered each of the protruding rivets — he seemed to derive pleasure in the touch — giggled to himself and arose, smiling. "Yo' am a true fren', yo' ole chist; why doan de jedge ax yo' what yo' did wid de gol'?" Abruptly turning to the judge, he said: "Ax de chist, Jedge."

"Never mind the story the chest might tell," said the judge; "what did you do next?"

"I put on de obahcoat an' pulled de comfort obah my ears an' drew on de coon-skin mittens an' stahted into de storm fo' de pahson in Stringtown."

"You did not hide the money?"

"No, sah."

"You started for Stringtown with the key of the chest in your pocket?"

"Wid dis heah key s'cuah'ly in de pocket ob de pants," and Cupe held the key aloft.

"Is that the chest, Cupe?"

"It am de chist; dah ain't no uddah chist like it dis side ob Mexiky, wha' Ma'se Hardman got et in de wah. Yo' know, Jedge, he fought wid Gen'ral Butlah ob Cah'lton."

"Is there no other key, Cupe?"

The old darkey rose up and faced the judge. "What yo' ax, Ma'se?"

"There is no other key?" repeated the judge, leaning over and gazing intently at the negro.

For once it seemed as though Cupe's native wit had deserted him. He stooped down, thrust the key to its place, removed the great iron from its socket, held it up to the judge and said:

"Dah am moah dan a t'ousan' keys in de worl', Ma'se; yo' knows dah am uddah keys; what fo' yo' ax Cupe sech a quistion es dat?"

"I mean is there another key like the one you hold in your hand?"

"Yo' ax es t' wheddah dah be 'nuddah key cap'ble ob unlockin' de lid ob dis chist, 'nuddah key like dis key?"

"Yes."

"Den Cupe kin ansah de quistion, case he knows de ansah. Dah ain't no uddah key like dis one, dah nebbah hab been but one key t' fit dat keyhole sense Ma'se brought de box from Mexiky. Ef Cupe wah on his dyin' bed an' de fires wah buhn'n' fo' his soul, an' de good Lawd should say, 'Cupe, yo' kin save yo'sef de red-hot pitchfork ob de debbil ef yo' say dah am 'nuddah key t' dis cubbah,' Cupe could n't say de word t' save his soul lessen he would lie. Dah am no uddah key, Ma'se."

"And so, Cupe, you left the gold in the chest that evening? No person could have opened the chest without the key, and it was in your possession until it was delivered to the officer appointed to take charge of the effects of your master?"

"'Zac'ly."

"How could the money have got out of the chest?" The judge spoke severely, and, eyeing Cupe, pointed into the empty box.

"Who say et git out ob de chist?" retorted Cupe, "not dis nigger."

"It is not there."

The negro dropped on his knees again and gazed into its rusty interior. "Suah dah ain't no gol' t' be seen, an' Cupe am glad et ain't t' be seen. De sign what nebbah lie say de gol' wah fo' de gearl, but ef et could be scraped t'geddah by de const'ble et 'ud go into de pocket ob de lawyah. Yo' am right, Ma'se Elford, de chist won't tell no tales t' de lawyah, an' Cupe hab tole de truff an' nuffin but de truff es he swore t' do. Dah ain't nuffin moah t' say." He lowered the cover of the chest and turned the key.

Vainly did the judge try by art and persuasion to induce the old man to add to or detract from his statement; he declined to alter his testimony in any way, but seated himself in the prisoner's box, thrust a shred from a leaf of tobacco between his lips, where, like a straw between two rubber shoes, it wabbled from side to side. With closed eyes and see-sawing foot, old Cupe sat silent.

Then the attorney for the defence arose, and in a despondent tone, addressing the judge, said: "I submit the side of the defence to your Honour without argument and throw my client on the mercy of the Court."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RIGHT OF CLERGY

NEVER did the court of Stringtown County convene with spectators more intensely interested and more prompt in assembling. When the clerk made the opening cry every place was filled, and even the two side aisles were partly occupied by chairs brought from the bar-room of the nearest tavern. The universal opinion was that the jury must find Cupe guilty; and the only question which perplexed the village was regarding the penalty likely to be inflicted. The charge of the judge was soon delivered; it was short, and so clearly drawn as to leave the jury no alternative but to bring in a verdict against the defendant. As the twelve men filed slowly from the room it required but little of the spirit of prophecy to foresee that they would soon return. After a brief consultation the jury came back to the box, and the announcement was made by the court officer that they were ready to return their verdict.

"Gentlemen of the jury, are you agreed?" asked the judge.

"We are," said the foreman, and handed the Court a paper, from which his Honour read aloud:

"We do unanimously agree that in wilfully secreting a large sum of money which had been entrusted to his care Cupid Hardman is guilty of high crime against the commonwealth of Kentucky."

"Stand up, prisoner," said the judge, "while the sentence of the law is pronounced."

Cupid arose and looked the judge in the face. Then occurred a strange thing, for a cry from one in the aisle, who was standing upright at the back of the room, broke the stillness.

"I ask for justice!"

Audacious interruption this, in a Kentucky court.

The judge looked steadily at the intruder; every face was turned in the direction whence the startling cry had come; every face, I may say, but one. Cupe neither moved nor changed expression.

In the rear of the centre aisle, with a leather-bound book held high in his hand, Mr. Wagner, the Stringtown clerk, stood expectant, and as the eyes of the assembly turned upon him he repeated:

"Justice! justice! I ask for justice — justice at the hands of the Court, your Honour!"

"Justice is the right of him who appeals to a court of justice," answered the judge. "For whom do you ask justice?"

"For the prisoner before you, for the slave, Cupid Hardman."

"Justice he shall have in accordance with the testimony. Listen to the charge."

"Hold your word, your Honour. I ask for justice in the name of equity, not according to the testimony. Listen, your Honour, listen until you hear the statutory claim of him who demands the right."

Bearing aloft the book, the uncouth man advanced slowly down the aisle until he stood before the bench. Then, thrusting the volume into the hand of the slave, he spoke in a deliberate, slow tone, looking straight into the face of the judge. "I claim for this slave, Cupid Hardman, the *Right of Clergy*, and this demand I make in the name of the law of this great commonwealth of

Kentucky and on behalf of justice, for I believe him to have done no crime."

The judge folded his arms on his chest and not less deliberately replied:

"The claim is a legal one and accords with the statutes of the commonwealth. Open the book, Cupid Hardman, and if you can read aloud the Constitution of the United States, the brand may be applied to your hand and you may go forth freed from the charge pending against you."

The aged negro opened the book and read (or repeated) word for word the entire Constitution of the United States, and, having handed the book back to his champion, stood awaiting the next motion of the Court.

"The brand! the brand of fire! bring in the brand!" ordered the judge in a faltering, low tone.

Turning toward the aisle, the lank clerk again held up his hand, which, high above the heads of the people, could be plainly seen from the corridor without. In answer to that signal, following the footsteps of the Stringtown clerk, advanced a figure familiar to nearly all who were present — the figure of the old Jew, Mose.

The habitual, emotionless smile wreathed his glossy face, a smile that contrasted strangely with the solemnity of the occasion, a smile unquestionably out of place in the present assembly. He carried a tinner's charcoal furnace fired to redness, into the living coals of which was thrust a searing iron such as is used to-day for branding beasts. Placing the heated furnace on the floor before the negro, the Jew drew the brand from the glowing brazier and stood awaiting the next order of the judge.

"Sheriff, proceed with your duty! Cupid, hold out your hand!" ordered the judge.

The Right of Clergy

The sheriff grasped the hot iron, Cupe extended his bare palm, the heated metal came in contact with the living tissue, a puff of blue vapour shot from the contact surfaces, a sizzling sound followed, and a shudder swept over the spectators, many of whom covered their faces. A quick cry, loud and shrill, pierced the air when that vapour curled upward, and with a bound the little girl leaping from the arms of Dinah, sprang between the executioner and the victim. Striking up the hand which held the hot iron, she threw an arm around the waist of Cupe and stood defiantly beside him, shaking her tiny fist at the sheriff of Stringtown County.

But Cupe, with extended arm still held before the sheriff, made no attempt to avoid the ordeal. He had not flinched, no cry of pain broke from his lips, no struggle to escape the brand of fire.

"'Scuse de chile, Mr. Sheriff," he said gently, as with his left hand he tenderly stroked her hair. "She am but a leetle gearl an' lub de ole nigger. *Go on wid de act!*"

"Enough! enough!" ordered the judge; "you are free to go home, Cupid; you are freed from the sentence of the Court, by the *Right of Clergy*." [1]

[1] "The last time this plea was allowed in Kentucky was in the Barren Circuit Court, where a negro was on trial for rape before Judge Richard Buckner, and as the prosecutrix was a white woman, he was sentenced to death, owing to the bitter prejudices of a white jury, although the evidence against him was clearly insufficient. The learned judge, heartily sympathizing with the poor wretch, thought of this plea as a means of escape for him, and instructed his attorneys to make it. The negro being tendered the United States Constitution, and found able to read it, he was accordingly burned in the hand and discharged from custody. The plea was shortly afterward (in 1847) abolished by the Legislature." — *Sixth Kentucky Law Reporter*, p. 508. This statute was carried into Kentucky law from England where, as is known, the "Right of Clergy" was allowed but once to a claimant who was then branded in the palm or on the ball of the thumb to prevent a second appeal. Few Americans are aware that

Many of the audience came to the bondman's side when court adjourned and shook the uninjured hand. Men praised the negro's fortitude, for Kentuckians love a brave man, be he black or white; and old Dinah, mumbling to herself, bound the heroic man's hand in a red bandanna handkerchief. At last the room was vacated of all but the court officers, the friends of Cupe and the late prisoner.

"You are free to go home," repeated the judge.

"Yo' hab de t'anks ob an ole, ign'rant nigger, Ma'se Jedge, fo' yoah many kindnesses, but Cupe 'ud like t' ax a quistion."

"Certainly."

"Kin de chist go nome wid de nigger?"

"Yes."

Cupe made a low courtesy, stooped over, and with his uninjured arm attempted to throw the heavy box upon his shoulder. The sheriff came to his assistance, and by their combined efforts the burden was lifted to its brawny resting place. As Cupid left the court room the sheriff remarked: "Devilish heavy for an empty box."

The judge made no reply.

And so the gold I had been promised and on which I had built great air castles was lost to me forever. With dragging feet I moved from the door of the courthouse to the wagon of Mose, the huckster, and there, with arms clasped over my head, with face hidden from the light, leaning against the hind wheel of that dilapidated vehicle, I sobbed gently and nervously kicked the sod on which my tears were falling. The horse of the

this curious old law ever had a footing in our land. See "Neck Verse," usually Psalm li. 1, which if the prisoner could read entitled him, after branding, to his freedom, thus saving his *neck*.

Hebrew, untied at the rear of the wagon, stood munching the remnant of a dinner from the worn trough which hung on the back part of the wagon bed; but I gave no heed to the beast, even when its hairy lips were flipped carelessly against my cheek. A flock of barn pigeons whistled about my head and alighted near my feet, picking up the scattered grains of corn that had dropped upon the ground from the mouth of the horse, but for once my hand forgot its cunning and no stone was raised. Aunt Dinah, leading the little girl, passed me and climbed into the wagon. Mose placed the brazier in the wagon, having previously emptied the fiery contents on the roadside, then harnessed his horse and proceeded to hitch the faithful beast in the shafts. I heard next the footsteps of old Cupe approaching, the iron chest upon his shoulder. The chest was deposited on the ground near me, and as the negro straightened up, the 'bus to Stringtown, filled to its utmost capacity, rolled by. A cheer went up in honour of Cupe, who waved his bandaged hand in return. As the omnibus rattled along I raised my eyes, and beheld near me in the tail of the covered wagon a round, red face, surmounted by a mop of bright red hair: it was the face of a boy about my own age. A derisive smile spread over the florid countenance, a mouth was "made," into which more sarcasm and irony were thrown than can be put into any other countenance on earth than that of a malignant boy, and a hand, red as a duck's foot, placed its thumb on the red nose and twisted its fingers. It was hatred at first sight. I, who stood by the wagon wheel, forgot my own troubles, straightened up and shook my fist defiantly back at the boy in the tail of the 'bus, and, grasping a clod (no stone was near), hurled it at the retreating form. As the vehicle vanished in a

cloud of dust Cupe placed his hand on my head and muttered:

"De signs am fulfillin' monstrous fas' an' de meanin' ob de sign t' yo' am — look out fo' dat *Red-Head Boy!*"

CHAPTER XX

JUDGE ELFORD

THE following day another interesting trial was conducted in the Court of Stringtown County. The force of the commonwealth was expended in a vain attempt to disprove the legality of the short will of the "Corn Bug" as recorded on the slate of the child and witnessed by the dead minister. Again the judge permitted the evidence of the negress Dinah to be taken, and in summing up the case, declared that both in intent and deed the law had been complied with in the drafting of that unusual will concerning the authenticity of which there was no doubt, for the handwriting of Mr. Jones was well known and Dinah testified that it had been drawn by the direct command of the "Corn Bug." The property of the "Corn Bug" was not claimed by kindred and, other than a disinherited, adopted brother, there were no possible heirs in law, for death had ended the line of descent. In sound mind and health, Mr. Hardman had openly stated in Stringtown, in presence of the Court and others, that the land and all but two thousand dollars of the gold (that had no legal existence) was to go to the girl. She was his heir, and the Court must certify to the legality of the will and appoint an administrator for the child. For that office the judge named Mr. Wagner, the clerk of Stringtown, who at once qualified and received his appointment. Thus when time for adjournment arrived that day, the tragedy be-

gun in the tempest of the dying year, 1863, had closed so far as it concerned the present term of the Stringtown County Court.

When Judge Elford returned to his home, exhausted by the cares of the days that had preceded, his form was bent more than usual and his footsteps lagged as he moved from the door of the 'bus to his own threshold. But he made no complaint. And when the kerosene lamp was lighted and the window curtains of the small front room were drawn after supper, the faithful student and unselfish judge sat once more before his desk, which, with its bookcase above, constituted the greatest treasure of his lonely house.

Gone were his children, out into the world, — they had left him long ago; gone was the wife of his bosom — many years she had rested beneath the sward enclosed in Stringtown's white-palinged fence; gone were the ambitions of boyhood and manhood; all had been swept away by the resistless broom that had brushed the years into oblivion. His life had been spent unselfishly in behalf of his countrymen and his beloved Commonwealth; no charity had appealed to him in vain, no wanderer had gone from his door unfed, penniless each New Year found him and penniless each old year left this man who spent the material returns that came with each season in behalf of his fellow-men, and gave his intellectual self to the cause of justice. Alone in his modest study sat the weary, venerable Kentucky judge, typical of hundreds of others who lived thirty years ago in that border State.

And as he sat in the dim lamplight of that modest room the record of his years arose before him, bearing again to his gaze the mother from out the long, long-ago, the boyish feet, the spring of youth, the ambition

of middle age and lastly the closing of life's hopes and cares in the edge of the ending that was yet to come. And then, as the chain of thought-links closed, he rose, took from its place in the bookcase above him the leather-bound volume that he had opened in the presence of the village clerk, opened it again to the same page, that which gave the account of the Case in the Barren County Court, and read: "I claim the *Right of Clergy* for this slave." Then Cupe's face came up and the past was pictured. Again he saw the open tomb into which the casket had been lowered; Cupe kneeling beside once more with strap in hand; again the face of the old darkey was raised as it had been in the long buried past; the raindrops fell, patter, patter; the sound of the vanished raindrops, deadened to all but him who sat alone that night, came again to life, and the mood-struck man heard from memory's chamber the voice of the old negro who by his command had been so recently tortured, gently repeat: "Bressed am de dead what de rain falls on."

Slowly the head of the careworn man fell upon the hands that were now crossed over the open volume. The aching forehead touched the printed page, and as recent events crushed into his mind the lips again murmured the sentence spoken over that book, in that same room the night of Mr. Wagner's visit: "God forgive me if I have done a wrong."

CHAPTER XXI

WHY THE HONEY BEE DON'T SUCK RED CLOVER

A CORN-SHUCK chair, tipped back in the sunshine, stood beside a cabin door. Cupe, with crossed legs, one foot resting on a round of the chair, sat balanced thereon. The hanging foot was beating time to an aged violin, keyed to the highest tone, from which came the familiar tune: "Run, Nigger, Run, or White Man 'll Catch You," a favourite with antebellum darkeys. The hand that held the bow was bandaged, but that did not disturb the peace of mind of the owner or injure in the least the tune he scraped from the loved instrument. Near the door a gaunt coon hound was peacefully sleeping, his nose between his forelegs, the tips of his flabby ears falling to the earth. In front of the negro stood a little girl with clean face and smoothly combed hair. She was clad in oddly cut garments, very prim, stiff, almost fantastic, but faultlessly clean. She was enjoying the music, and from time to time would clap her hands and dance artlessly and joyously. The lively tune, quite out of keeping with the player's sedate appearance, was accompanied at intervals with snatches of songs, of which the following are fair samples:

Ya — ya — ya — ya — ya,

Look upon de mantelpiece,
Han' me down my candle grease,
Grease my cart an' grease my gear,
Grease ole Ball behin' de ear.

CHORUS.

Dance, chile, dance. An' a walk ole Hogan walk,
An' a walk ole Hogan walk. An' a walk ole
Hogan walk, ole Hogan walk along.
Ya — ya — ya — ya — ya.

De little bee suck de blossom,
De big bee make de honey,
De nigger wo'k terbacky, an'
De white man spen' de money.

CHORUS.

Dance, chile, dance, etc.

When I went down ter Shin Bone Shank,
De creek wah wide an' deep,
I put my foot on de grey goose' back,
An' she carried me 'cross de creek.

CHORUS.

Dance, chile, dance, etc.

At each call of "Dance, chile, dance," the girl pranced and scampered around in true negro style, and when the chorus was over waited expectant for the next stanza. Occasionally old Cupe excitedly jumped from the chair, holding his violin and bow aloft in his uninjured hand, and with characteristic negro step and comical motion joined in the dance, continuing to sing. Then, seating himself, he changed the tune and sang a few verses, the last one running as follows :

Some fo'ks say dat de nigger won't steal,
But I caught six in my corn fiel',
Tied 'em down wid a little piece ob twine.
Up wid my whip an' I gib 'em ninety-nine.

CHORUS.

Dance, chile, dance, etc.

Wha'd yo' come from, knock a nigger down,
Wha'd yo' come from, Apalackytown.
Wha'd yo' come from, knock a nigger down,
Wha'd yo' come from, Apalackytown.

"Oh, Uncle Cupe," chimed in the child, "did you whip the niggers?"

"Yes, chile, yes, and heah am de string what dey wah tied wid. Ya, ya." And old Cupe pulled a slender piece of twine from beneath a patch, for once more he wore the patched garments of many colours that had been taken from him during his imprisonment.

"Tell me a story, Uncle Cupe."

"What shall et be 'bout, chile?"

"Anything you will tell me."

The negro cast his eyes about, and they rested on a jabbering flock of ducks. "I 'll tole you why de turkey say 'tuck, tuck' an' de duck say 'day, day.'"

The child clapped her hands.

"One time de turkey an' de duck git t' yargerin' 'bout which could wake fust in de mahn'n. An' befo' dey go t' sleep dey settle de mattah by 'greein' among demsels dat de fust dat wake should tole de uddah dat he see de day. Up t' dis time de two had roosted t'geddah on de groun', but dis night de turkey tuhn his back on his fren'. De ole turkey roost up in de top ob de tree, an' early in de mahn'n see de light creepin' obah de hill; but de duck who sit on de groun' could n't cotch de gleamin'. An' de turkey called down, 'Tuck, tuck,' an' de duck wake up. I tole yo', chile, dat de duck am a sly crittah. He know dat de stupid turkey see de light, but dat de ole fool had n't sense nuff t' say so. An' de duck hollah back 'Day, day, day!' an' he win de bet. Ebah sense dat time" (and Cupe looked very solemn) "de turkey hab said, 'tuck, tuck,' an' de duck hab said, 'day, day.' Ebah sense dat time de turkey hab roost in de tree an' de duck hab sot on de earf. Dese birds wah close fren's once, but dey hab monstrous little use fo' each uddah now."

The child applauded and said: "Tell me another story, Uncle Cupe."

Again the negro looked about for an object lesson, and caught sight of a honey bee sucking a white clover head in the grass-plot at his feet.

"I 'll tole yo' why de honey bee doan suck red clovah."

The child repeated her applause, and the old negro continued:

"When de Lawd make de honey bee an' de bumble bee he make red an' white clovah de same mahn'n'. An' de Lawd take de two bees to de fiel' ob clovah an' he sot em on de fence an' 'pared t' gib 'em some 'vice. An' when dem bees see de clovah patch an' smell de honey, dey doan wait fo' no moah observashuns, but make a bre'k fo' de blos'm, lebin' de Lawd standin' 'side de fence; an' dis actin' up make de Lawd pow'ful cross. An' he grab at dem two bees es dey fly 'way, an' cotch de honey bee; but de bumble bee wah too sharp fo' him an' git 'way, an' he hide in de clovah patch. Den de Lawd say t' de honey bee, what he hold 'twixt his fingahs: 'Yo' caint git 'way 'til yo' make up yoah min' t' one ob two tings.' De bee ax what dey wah, an' de Lawd spoke de word wid be bark on it:

"'Ef yo' suck red clovah, yo' can't wo'k on Sunday. Ef yo' wo'k on week-days an' Sundays, too, yo' can't suck red clovah. Yo' kin take yoah ch'ice.'

"An' den de bee, he know de Lawd am in earnest, an' he debate de subject obah 'til de Lawd git tired ob waitin', an' say: 'Ef yo' doan make yoah min' up pow'ful quick yo' ll git de life squeezed out ob yo';' an' he gib dat bee a leetle squeeze. An' den de honey bee hollah out dat he choose t' wo'k eb'ry day ob de week, Sunday an' all. So de Lawd make him promise not t' suck red clovah blos'm, ef he 'low him t' wo'k on Sun-

day, an' de honey bee hab nebbah suck a head ob red clovah, nebbah. But de bumble bee, what did n't make no promise t' de Lawd, suck bof red an' white clovah week-day an' Sunday." Again the child clapped her hands, and Cupe thrust a fresh leaf of tobacco into his flabby mouth.

"Tell me another story, Uncle."

The negro shaded his eyes with his unbound hand, and gazed intently over the distant hill. "Chile, what yo' see com'n' obah de rise on de Stringtown paff?" The girl turned in the direction indicated, and quickly answered: "A man, Uncle."

"Jump down, honey, run t' Aunt Dinah." Cupe arose with this unceremonious dismissal and walked toward the man, muttering as he did so: "P'r'aps et es bes' ef de conbersashun ain't hea'd by de honey chile; dah hab be'n bodin' signs ob late, an' et may be bes' fo' Cupe t' be alone. Las' night when de moon go down, de cheer an' de table creek an' crack, de kettle move on de harf, de doah push in an' out, but dah wa'n't no wind. De sign wah bad, an' Cupe am suah dat trouble am movin' 'bout." He turned back at this juncture, and spoke to the sleeping hound: "Yo' may come, Dgawge Wash'n't'n," and the old dog, obedient to his master's word, arose, yawned and came to his side.

The stranger was Mr. Wagner, who was warmly welcomed by the negro. Well might Cupe bid him a cordial good-day, for it will be remembered that by means of the patient instruction of Mr. Wagner, illiterate Cupe acquired a knowledge of the Constitution of the United States, and thus saved himself a term in the penitentiary. The tragic occurrence, vivid in the mind of the old negro, led him, on meeting the clerk, to extravagance of speech and to thanks so prolific as to give the hearer no opportunity to say a word.

"An' t' t'ink dat Cupe distrusted yo' when he seed yo' com'n' an' feared dat yo' brung bad news. Wah dah ebah so mighty a 'stake! Come into de house, Ma'se, an' take a glass ob milk an' see de chile what yo' gladden wid de sight ob Uncle Cupe. Et wah a mighty close shave, Ma'se, an' t' t'ink dat Cupe wah afeard yo' brung bad news."

The visitor entered the cabin and partook of a drink of fresh buttermilk, but notwithstanding Cupe's cordial welcome seemed ill at ease. At last he said: "Cupid, you are aware, are you not, that I am appointed guardian for this little girl? What 's her name?"

The countenance of the negro changed in an instant, and he gave expression to the oft-repeated sentence of surprise.

"Spoke ag'n, Ma'se. De name am Susie."

"I have been appointed guardian for Susie."

"Yo' hab moah t' say; go on."

"You know, Cupid, that this is not an appropriate place to bring up a child. You and Dinah have not the opportunities necessary to the education and cultivation of the girl. She is the heir of this large farm, and should have the advantages of a good education, and the company of playmates befitting her station."

The shrewd negro intuitively grasped the meaning of the pointed words of Mr. Wagner.

"An' why doan yo' let de nigger go ter de pen'tensh'ry ef yo' 'tend t' take 'way de chile? What fo' yo' lead him back t' sorrah? Stan' up, Dinah, an' beg fo' de sake ob de honey deah. Yo' doan mean et, Ma'se Wagnah, yo' doan mean et; yo' am jokin' wid de poo' ole man. Yo' 'udn't take de blos'm, yo' udn't cave in de heaht ob de two ole fo'ks?"

"Cupid, I am in earnest. The child must remain in

my care in Stringtown. Judge Elford appointed me administrator."

The old slave fell upon his knees, and with uplifted hands, with all the force and extravagance of the negro language, begged for the child he had raised. "De honey am our chile, I foun' de baby an' its muddah half starved on de grabe in Bloody Hollah. We wahm et by de fiah, we sit up in de night, an' watch obah et in de day; we promise de ma'se what wah t' keer fo' et es ef et wah de baby chile ob de ma'se hisse'f. Yo' won't take de pritty chile 'way, et am de light ob day t' de two ole fo'ks who hain't nuffin else t' lib fo'."

"It must be, Cupid: for the child's sake, it is best. However, you need not feel so disconsolate. Aunt Dinah and yourself will have opportunities to visit Susie often, and she can come to the cabin occasionally. Remember, this is her cabin and land, you and Dinah are her slaves, and you may have the care of the land and live here."

But explanations and soft words made no impression on either of the negroes. Although Cupid did all the supplicating, it could be seen that Dinah was not less heart-stricken. She stood by Cupe's side and silently wept, clasping the frightened child, who did not understand, yet realised that she was concerned in the trouble that had fallen on her two friends, the only friends she knew in the world. Weeping she clung to the neck of the old woman.

But the scene finally came to an end, and Mr. Wagner insisted that the child be given to his care. "You may bring her clothes later, Cupe," he added.

"De clo's will come befo' da'k," replied the old man, "but yo' bettah let de chile change dem ole slippahs fo' de new pair. Dem wah put on fo' de purpose ob de

dance." The change was made, and then Cupe offered no further objection to the decision of the Court.

Clasping the frightened little girl in his arms her uncouth but kind-hearted benefactor retreated along the path by which he came. The sobbing child made no resistance nor outcry. Cupe stood in the cabin door, the violin lay at his feet, the flock of ducks jabbered beside the fence, but were unheard, the bumble bee buzzed in the clover patch, but unseen. There was no song now in the heart of the forlorn man, no music, no folk-lore stories in his soul. His eyes followed the retreating figure of the lank officer with the child in his arms, until together they vanished beyond the crest of the distant hill. Then his gaze turned upon the vacant spot where, a short time before, Susie had danced to the tune of his merry violin, and a tear sprang to his eyes and rolled down his wrinkled cheek — the first tear he had shed during the sorrowful interview. Old George Washington lay curled up beside the door, and Dinah on her knees, holding in her hand a child's plaything — a gourd cut to look like the head of a man — moaned inside the cabin. "An' dah wah trouble com'n'," said Cupe; "de sign could n't lie. When de table an' de cheer talk t'geddah, an' de doah move in an' out in de still night, et am a sign ob saht'n trouble. But dah am deeper trouble yit to come; when de two boys mix in de 'fairs ob de honey gearl, dah am worsah trouble fo' Cupe."

Then he spoke to Dinah: "Git up, yo' fool nigger, what fo' yo' blubberin' like a sick sheep? Doan yo' know dat eb'ry fellah hab t' stan' his own toofache? Doan yo' know dat cryin' salty tears doan stop no bleeding heaht? Git de chile some clo's, fo' de night am com'n'!"

A little while later the devoted man might have been seen slowly trudging along the path the clerk had trod; over his shoulder he carried a bundle containing the clothing of the child; now at his heels, with downcast head, as if he entered into the sorrow of his master, walked George Washington.

CHAPTER XXII

"GOD MADE DE SIGN"

THE home of Mr. Wagner was on the Stringtown pike, about one-third of the distance between the southern and the northern extremities of the village. Its owner was not in affluent circumstances; still he lived comfortably. An unmarried sister acted as housekeeper, and it would have been difficult to determine by their countenances which was the older. However, no question could arise concerning their relationship, for the maiden lady, fully as spare and nearly as tall as her lank brother, possessed features so similar as to bespeak the close family connection. Her face was kindly in its expression, and it was evident that Susie had fallen into good hands. The thoughtful judge had made no mistake in the selection of the child's guardian.

To this home, that rested its face against the edge of the pike, and its heel-like shed in the narrow lot that stretched back to the woodland pasture, the village clerk carried the unwilling charge he had taken from the home of Cupe. The girl was still sobbing; she had refused the kindly advances of such of the neighbours as chanced to be in the street, and would not be comforted. It chanced that I stood before my mother's door as, together with her new guardian, she passed by, but she gave no sign of recognition when I called her name. Judge Elford came out of his house and took her kindly by the hand, but she buried her face in the shoulder of

the man who carried her, and refused to speak. The sister of Mr. Wagner was alike unsuccessful; she could get no kind word; the untamed child refused to eat and refused to play. She fell asleep sobbing, and was gently laid on the little bed that had been prepared for her by the expectant and puzzled spinster. Then it was that a tap was heard at the door, and on opening it the bent form of Cupe appeared. Handing Miss Wagner the package of clothes, he silently turned away and vanished in the darkness.

A few moments later Judge Elford was disturbed by a similar knock, and opened the door to find the disconsolate negro on the threshold.

At the pressing invitation of the judge, Cupe stepped inside the door, but, in accordance with the custom of old slaves, refused to sit down.

"What can I do for you, Cupid?"

"De light ob de cabin am gone, de clouds am risen, an' Cupe ax fo' comfo't."

"But what can I do for you?" repeated the judge.

"Yo' kin send de man ob sorrah ter de pen'tensh'ry, fo' he ain't no moah use heah. Yo' kin do de duty yo' spoke 'bout las' week, Ma'se Elford."

"Indeed I cannot. You have freed yourself from the penitentiary by the Right of Clergy."

"De law am pow'ful strong when a man wan's et weak, an' monstrous weak when a man wan's et strong; ef a man wan's t' git out ob de pen'tensh'ry he can't git de doah op'n, case ob de law; ef he wants t' git into de pen'tensh'ry he can't git dah case ob de law. De law am monstrous cu'yus."

"But you don't want to go to the penitentiary, Cupe?"

"'Deed I does, case dah ain't nuffin t' lib fo' out ob

et now dat yo' hab took de chile 'way. She am white an' Cupe am brack; but de chile wah raised from a baby by de brack man; de ole nigger promise Ma'se Hardman t' keer fo' her 'til deff come, an' he promise de muddah ob de chile befo' God t' watch obah her 'til she wah able t' keer fo' herse'f. Dese am serous tings t' promise t' de ma'se what am dead an' t' de angel mammy, an' t' bre'k de wo'd am wicked, an' Cupe doan want t' be walkin' free an' not doin' what he say on his knees he 'ud do. Ef de nigger am in de pen'tensh'ry an de dead ma'se come an' say in a dream: 'Why ain't yo' keerin' fo' de blos'm?' Cupe kin say back: 'Caint yo' see dat de nigger am in de jail?' Ef de sperrit ob de muddah ob de chile come floatin' into de cabin an' say: 'Wha' am de baby Susie what yo' fin' on de grabe in Bloody Hollah?' what kin Cupe say ef he am free t' walk 'bout? 'Deed, Ma'se Elford, I does wan' t' go t' de pen'tensh'ry, an' ef yo' keer fo' de peace ob min' ob de ole man yo 'll sen' him dah."

"Go home, Cupid, go home and sleep. You will feel better in the morning. Susie is well, has a good home, and will see you often."

"An' yo' won't lis'n t' de claim ob de sah'rin' nigger?"

"I cannot."

The old negro opened the door and hesitated on the sill. "An' yo' caint sen' de nigger t' de pen'tensh'ry?"

"No, Cupid."

"An' yo' caint gib him back de chile?"

The judge shook his head.

"Do yo' see wha' Cupe am stan'n'? Et am on de doah-sill, Ma'se Elford, an' dat sign say bad luck t' yoah argyment. Lis'n t' what de ole nigger tole yo' now. De *law* say dat de chile can't lib wid Cupe, but de *sign*

say dat she mus' lib wid Cupe — ef she lib. Ef de law am right, de sign am wrong. Who made de law?" he vehemently asked.

"Wise and good men," replied the judge.

"An' God make de sign. Do de wise man set hisse'f 'bove de Lawd? Ma'se Elford, yo 'll lib t' see dat de Lawd am biggah dan de law."

CHAPTER XXIII

SUSIE IS LOST

JUDGE Elford found as the days passed that the child whose lot had been cast among the negroes refused to be comforted by her friendly benefactors. She moved about disconsolate in her new home, spiritless and moping the hours away. She shrank from Miss Wagner, she asked for no love, and gave none. To escape the gaze of men and children, she would sit for hours in the back yard of the cottage, where, secure from prying eyes, she spent the time listlessly gazing at the sky or the forest in the distance. Neither Cupe nor Dinah visited her, and both declared they would never do so. The entreaties of the judge and Mr. Wagner, even the threats of the latter, made no impression on either of them.

"Ef yo' caint keer fo' de chile, what fo' yo' took her 'way from de home wha' she wah happy? Ef Cupe go t' see de honey, it 'll only make de mattah wussah, fo' she 'll cry her eyes out when he come back."

"But you can tell her that it is best for her to stay in her new home. You can explain to her that she can be happy if she will try to forget her past life."

"An' dah am uddah tings Cupe could tole her what ain't true es easy es dat, but de fac' am yo' tire yo'selb tryin' t' 'fluence Cupe t' do anything t' circumbent de spell. Dah am but one outcome t' dis heah mattah, eidah yo'

mus' let de chile lib wha' she b'long er yo 'll stan' 'side her grabe. De spell say dah am no uddah endin'."

Persuasions were of no avail. Cupe had a ready answer for every argument and sat looking as glum as a death's-head. Thus the child lived in her new home until one morning when the care-worn housekeeper went to awaken her, the little bed was found empty. The girl had disappeared. The day before she had asked some trivial questions, and in the course of her conversation had referred to one of Cupe's wild sayings. Miss Wagner had taken the opportunity to explain that Cupid was mistaken in his methods, and that in time the child would understand his errors. Susie stood with downcast eyes, from which fell a few glistening tears. It was evident that she took the disparagement of Cupe to heart. She left the room, seated herself in the sunshine of the back yard, and to the time of going to bed did not speak a word. The next morning the child and her garments were missing. From beneath the very touch of her faithful guardian, catlike she had slipped out, and into the back yard, out and into the great wide world of which she knew so little. Could the sleepers in the modest dwelling have seen her that night, they would have seen her clasp her garments in her arms, and in bare feet tiptoe to the kitchen door; they would have seen her turn the key as cautiously as an experienced burglar might do, then, with instinctive forethought, reclose and lock the door from the outside; after which, in the light of the rising moon, the artful child dressed herself rapidly, even to carefully tying her shoes. At last, stealing through the little garden, she climbed the back fence into the woodland pasture and ran toward the distant forest.

A startling whisper went from mouth to mouth in

Susie is Lost

Stringtown, when the news went forth that the ward of Mr. Wagner had disappeared. The search, begun in expectation of soon finding the child, continued through the entire day. Wells and cisterns were probed, ponds were dragged.

CHAPTER XXIV

CUPE'S ADVICE TO HIS DOG

MR. WAGNER at once visited Cupe, taking me along, for I was known to be a close friend of the old negro. He was sitting in the accustomed chair beside his cabin door. He had turned for solace to his faithful violin, and long before the visitors reached the cabin we caught the mournful tones of a plaintive tune that spoke the mood of the musician's mind. George Washington looked up and growled, but, evidently under the command of an undertone from his master, closed his eyes and lowered his head. Cupe gave no sign of salutation; he continued his dolorous tune until the intruders stood close before him, and could distinguish a few lines of one of the most plaintive of negro melodies:

> Yo' ask what make dis niggah weep,
> Why he like uddahs am not gay,
> What make de teahs roll down his cheek
> From early dawn till broke ob day?

Interrupting the song, Cupe lowered his violin, arose and placed his chair before the man, but took no notice of me.

"What are you doing, Uncle Cupe?"

"Sah'rin'."

"Have you seen Susie?"

"No sah."

"She disappeared last night."

"I hab n't seed nuffin ob her."

"I thought that perhaps she had returned to her old home."

"She hab not be'n heah, an' I hab not seed de chile."

"You are sure, Cupe, that you know nothing of her whereabouts?"

"I hain't seed her, I tole yo', an' I hain't hea'd from her sense yo' took her 'way."

"You will help us search for her, Cupid? You know the land well, you will assist in her recovery?"

"I hab had nuffin t' do wid de takin' ob de honey, an' I will hab nuffin t' do wid de bre'kin' ob de spell. De cheer an' de table talk ag'n last night, de doah shake in an' out, an' Cupe wah waitin' fo' news ob trouble."

He dropped his voice, and added: "An' when Dgawge Wash'n't'n an' Cupe go out t' trail de coon, de headless dog come ag'n. Et wah down by the bars wha' de ole man Doty wah killed, an de hant dog slip close an' trot by Cupe's side, an' when Cupe walk slow de dog widout de head go slow, an' when Cupe move fas', de hant move fas'. An' nuffin but nigger kin see dat sign; ole Dgawge Wash'n't'n could n't see de crittah. Et wah a monstrous bad sign, an' Cupe tink ob de chile an' pray de Lawd dat de sign wah not pintin' t' de yinnecent chile."

Mr. Wagner, realising that he was losing time arguing with the superstitious old man, turned to go.

"Yo' had better look in de cabin befo' yo' lebe; yo' might feel es ef de nigger had 'varicated ef yo' doan."

Cupe opened the door, and Mr. Wagner stepped into the room. Dinah sat beside the hearth with bowed head, but no other person was to be seen. Cupe

pointed to each corner, to the empty space beneath the bed, and conducted his visitor into the loft, which contained no visible objects excepting the iron chest, some strings of dried corn, bunches of seeds and medicinal roots and herbs that hung about the rafters.

Leaving the house, Cupe insisted on a search being made of the shed-stable; indeed, he seemed afraid that some spot in which the child could be secreted might be overlooked. As Mr. Wagner entered the door of the shed-stable, my old black friend spoke to me in a low tone: "Did yo' see de Red-Head Boy ag'in?"

"No."

"Keep yoah eye op'n, peel yoah eye fo' dat chile."

Whatever else he might have said was lost, for at this point Mr. Wagner returned from his fruitless search of the shed and announced his intention to return to Stringtown.

As the visitors departed, Cupe bestowed upon them a very low bow, and having returned to his cabin and seated himself on the familiar chair, reached up to the hand of tobacco over his head, stripped a part of a leaf and thrust it between his flabby lips.

"Come heah, Dgawge Wash'n't'n," he commanded; and the four-footed friend laid its lank head on the knee of his master, who took its nose between his thumb and finger. "Yo' hab work t' do, Dgawge, wo'k t' do t'-night, Dgawge Wash'n't'n. When yo' hab wo'k t' do keep yoah nose cool."

"Dinah," he cried, "Dinah, don't yo' gib Dgawge nuffin t' eat till mahn'n."

CHAPTER XXV

THE HAUNTED HOLLOW

THE remainder of the day indolent old Cupe sat in his chair, seemingly contented when awake, but it would have been difficult to say just how much of the time he was awake. Occasionally he hummed a negro melody, again he would change the exhausted tobacco leaf between his lips for a fresh one, but much of the time with closed eyes he sat motionless. Just before the setting sun reached the horizon its slanting rays streamed into his face, and then he called to Dinah: "Brung de ole slippahs ob de honey chile and call Dgawge into de cabin an' den shet bof de doahs, an' keep him dah."

Dinah obeyed without question.

Cupe took two tobacco-sticks and fastened the shoes, one to the end of each. He began then to walk sideways, holding the sticks at arm's length, so that the shoes hung near the earth far outside his own tracks. In this manner he slowly passed along, and as he did so caused the shoes to step as if a child were walking parallel with his own footsteps. Across the dooryard, over the fence, down and across the little creek at the base of the hill, he trudged, and then, making a circuit, he came back again to the starting-place.

"De deed am done, an' now dis nigger 'll see ef Dgawge Wash'n't'n am in fix fo' de work ob his life. Let de dawg out, Dinah! Come heah, Dgawge."

The dog trotted out of the house. Taking the nose of the brute between his thumb and finger, as he had done before, the negro muttered: "Et am cool an' pleasant like t' de touch — de nose am fixed fo' de work. Yo' see dese slippahs, Dgawge?" — and Cupe held them before the eyes of the dog — "Yo' see dese heah slippahs?"

The dog whined gently.

"Yo' am no fool, Dgawge, but yo' bettah smell de leather, fo' yo' hain't no time fo' 'stakes now," and with these words the shoes were held to the dog's nose.

"Now am yo' ready fo' de test ob yoah life, Dgawge? Go fin' Susie! Go fin' de chile! Hunt fo' Susie, Dgawge!"

At once the old cur thrust his nose close to the earth and began a zigzag trot about the dooryard. Cupe watched him intently, and when he neared the trail of the slippers became visibly excited. At this instant the hound stopped; raising his head and dropping his lower jaw slightly, he gave a cry that stirred the heart of his master with pleasure.

"Yo' am tellin' de truff, suah! yo' am de crittah what kin keep yoah nose cool ef de weddah *am* wahm. Fin' Susie, Dgawge! Go fo' Susie!"

In reply, the dog started in a long lope with extended nose scarce depressed toward the earth, thus showing the acuteness of the trail; following the exact course of the circle Cupe had made, he returned to the starting-point. "Yo' am a daisy of a dawg, yo' hab wo'k t' do, but yo' don't git no suppah till yo' do et. Keep yoah nose cool, Dgawge."

Carefully putting the slippers into his breeches' pocket, Cupe, in obedience to the call of Dinah, step-

ped inside his cabin to partake of his own supper, while the hungry dog lingered outside the door.

Returning after the meal was over, the old man looked at the star-bedecked sky, from which the last tinge of twilight was fast fading, and then glanced at the spot where his dumb comrade rested.

"De hour hab come, Dgawge, de hour ob trial."

Slipping on a roundabout jacket that hung on a nail near the corn-shuck chair, and thrusting into its pocket a twist of leaf-tobacco, the old man turned to the open door. "Dinah," he said, "ef yo' doan see de dawg an' me befo' mahn'n, dah ain't no cause fo' feah."

"De moon doan rose 'til midnight; what fo' yo' go ahftah de coon now?" asked Dinah.

"Nebbah yo' min' de moon; dah am uddah crittahs dan coons."

"Yo' hab lef' yoah ax, Cupe, yo' hab lef' yoah ax!" cried Dinah, as her husband disappeared in the gloom.

"Dah am no need fo' de ax t'-night; de crittah what we hunts now am not in de tree no' in de grapevine tangle."

The huntsman and his dog were now alone together in the starlight.

Taking the path toward Stringtown, their course led them toward the brow of the hill. But before reaching the hill Cupe struck the toe of his left foot violently against a projecting stone. He immediately stopped, turned back, retraced his steps to the door of the cabin, and then recommenced his journey, muttering:

"Ef et had be'n the right toe, et 'ud hab be'n a sign ob good luck, but t' stump de lef' toe am an ebil sign. Dah ain't no resk t' be run t'-night. Dah ain't —"

The slave stopped, his bent body sunk yet nearer the earth; his mouth, still open, left the sentence incom-

plete. He heard a rustle in the grass just before him, and then a full-grown rabbit hopped into the path, halted momentarily, turned its great eyes, that yet glittered in the dusk, full upon the negro, and with a bound crossed the path and disappeared in the briars.

"De wussest sign what could be; de rabbet nebbah cross de paff outen de journey am leadin' t' hahm. An' et stop t' say, 'Go back, go back, yo' nigger, go back!' De crittah say et wid ets eyes. Monstrous bad am de endin' ob de walk ob de man who go on when de rabbet cross de paff ahead ob him. Dat wah not a libbin' rabbet, fo' de dawg did n't see er smell et. Et wah a hant."

Back to the cabin went the negro and taking two objects from a string behind the door, he carefully placed them in his pocket. "De cha'ms wah fergotten, an' de hant rabbet know et — de cha'ms t' keep off de hoodoo from Dgawge Wash'n't'n an' Cupe. Now de start am right."

Having thus corrected a grave blunder, Cupe moved rapidly until he reached the brow of the hill. Leaving the path at this point, he sought a small thicket, within which, by daylight, could have been seen an enclosure of stone that marked the foundation of an old building. At each end of the ruin two piles of stones were crumbling in the weather, the *débris* of the chimneys of the haunted mansion.

"Dgawge," said the negro addressing his dog, "yo' am in de sacredest spot on earf, de spot wha' de missus slep' her las' sleep. De shinin' face ob de suff'in' chile wah tu'n' t' glory from wha' stan' de 'simmon tree by yoah side. An' Cupe he kneel on de flo' ob de mansion what wah, an' hol' de dyin' han'. De sah'rin' times am back ag'in, Dgawge, de eye ob de missus look into

de heaht ob de nigger, de sweet face rise up an' speak 'bout de blos'm ob a chile she lebe wid Cupe an' Dinah."

The old man knelt in the grass and raised his face to the star-lit heavens.

"De blos'm am an angel now a-singin' hal'ujahs wid its muddah, but wha' am de Susie chile what take its place? Cupe am sah'rin' fo' de Susie gearl case he swar' t' watch obah de new chile. Dgawge, yo' kin smell tings what Cupe caint smell, but yo' caint see all de tings dat de nigger kin see. Ef yo' could an' 'ud look to'ard de ole well yo' 'ud see a man stan'—a man, Dgawge—de ole ma'se dat hab walked an' walked an' caint git no res'. He play keards when de chile wah bohn an' swar' at de sweet missus once too many times, an' fo' dat debbilment he hab t' walk de briar patch now. Cussed be de man who bring trouble t' a young muddah. Dah ain't no peace on earf, dah ain't no place in Heaben, de debbil hab no use fo' sech a sperrit. Yo' caint see him, Dgawge. Ef yo' could see what Cupe see, yo' 'ud stick yoah tail 'tween yoah legs an' run home t' Dinah. Come on, Dgawge, dah ain't no moah time fo' hant seein', we hab work t' do t'-night."

George and his master started, and soon the cry of the old hound floated in the air, and at once a whistle loud and shrill broke from the lips of Cupe. "Come heah, Dgawge! Come back, Dgawge Wash'n't'n!"

Obedient to the command, the dog came to his side.

"Yo' mus' n't act up any fool tricks t'-night, I tole yo'! De rabbet am all right when we hunt rabbet, but et am not fo' yo' dis yocasion. No moah rabbet, Dgawge," and the old man boxed the ears of his friend. "Now walk b'hin' till I tole yo' t' hunt."

The negro strode forward, the dog, with hanging head, following at his heels until the lights of Stringtown

came into view. Stopping then, the old man crouched in the grass and again spoke: "Dgawge, dah am no coon, no 'possum, no rabbet t'-night. De time am come fo' wo'k, an' ef yo' doan wo'k t'-night, de end ob yoah life am heah." Feeling of the dog's nose, the negro chuckled and then taking the little shoes out of his pocket, he held them before the eyes of the dog and touched them once more to his nose. "Hunt fo' Susie, Dgawge! hunt fo' Susie! slow," as the dog started off, "slow, Dgawge; de night am long."

The dog disappeared in the darkness, and Cupe, turning his steps so as to inscribe a circle about the Stringtown lights, wended his way slowly over the uneven land. From time to time he stopped to cheer the sagacious hound, which could be heard pressing through the bushes and occasionally, when on a ridge, could be seen pictured against the sky. Old Cupe, accustomed to nocturnal exploits with the dumb brute, knew exactly what he was doing as he circled about, and needed nothing more than the occasional sounds, that to an inexperienced ear would have conveyed no meaning, could they have been heard, to tell that the faithful animal was scouring every foot of territory in the vicinity. At last the steps of the negro led to a grapevine thicket in a ravine, and soon from its depths a loud howl came, a howl that to other persons than Cupe would have sounded exactly like the cry that led to the punishment of the dog at the time his ears were boxed for trailing a rabbit.

The cry had hardly subsided before Cupe gave a whistle, and soon the dog came to his side. "Dgawge, de 'possum am sweet t' de taste when the sweet'-tatah an' de frost am heah, but not t'-night. Yo' hab bettah wo'k t' do dan tree de 'possum, Dgawge," and again the patient creature's ears were boxed. "Now min' yoah

nose, Dgawge," and Cupe touched it again with the little shoe. "Hunt fo' Susie, Dgawge, hunt fo' Susie!"

The ground was slowly covered, fields of corn, open pasture, waste briar patches and woodlands. The Stringtown pike was crossed below the village, and on the return circuit crossed again above it, near the home of Mr. Nordman, the old Kentucky gentleman; the Mt. Carmel pike was also crossed and the heavy beechwood at the junction was passed, and yet no evidence of the movements of the dog and master could be heard other than the sound made by an occasional broken stick or a rustle of the bushes. Then, at last, the discouraged negro realised that he had completed the circuit of the village, for he stood near the spot where the circle began. The old man called his dog, and when he approached spoke to him as only a deeply earnest negro of the olden time could speak to a dumb brute. "De sign wah bad, fo' et wah de lef' toe, but did n't Cupe go back an' staht ag'in? De ebil ob de sign wah chahmed away, suah. De fault am not wid de nigger, but wid de dawg. Yo' am not workin', Dgawge, yo' hab been foolin' yoah time away." The harangue ended with a threat and the information that the village must again be tramped about, and that the next circle must be larger. Again they started around the village, but before doing so receded from the previous circle, so that this circuit would be much greater than the other. Patiently they passed over the land as they had done before, until the Stringtown pike below the village was reached. At this point, just as the negro prepared to climb the rail fence, he stopped and then sank upon the ground. "Stan' still, Dgawge," he slowly muttered; "dah am dangah in de ole pike; stan' still."

Peering through the rails, the kneeling negro saw, first, two silent horsemen approach; following which came a troop of about a hundred men, riding two abreast. When opposite the negro the troop halted, and then from beneath an adjacent tree a slight figure stepped to the side of the leader of the band, spoke a few words and disappeared toward the village. The troop resumed its way, and at last, about as far behind the cavalrymen as the advance guard had preceded them, came the rear-guard of two horsemen.

The tramp of the horses' feet, the occasional rattling of a sabre against a wooden stirrup, the smothered cough of an afflicted rider, and the cavalcade that had been pictured against the starry skies disappeared in the gloom.

"Dah am sorrah com'n' t' someone t'-night; de cav'lry doan trabel at midnight fo' fun. Befo' dis raid am obah some rebel boy 'll be to'n from de muddah what he come home t' see. Ef I knowed who dem blue coats wah ahftah! Damn dat young cuss, dah am mischief in de air, but dah am uddah wo'k fo' Cupe t'-night. Dah am trouble fo' uddahs as well es de rebel boy."

He moved on; the two pikes were crossed, the shadows of the beechwood were traversed and the second circuit of the village nearly completed when a cry from the dog broke upon the air, a cry that brought old Cupe to a stop so sudden that the foot was arrested in the air, slowly lowered, and then the negro fell upon his knees. No whistle broke from his lips this time, no scolding of George Washington, but in its stead the murmured words: "De Lawd be praised! stan' still, Dgawge Wash'n't'n. De track ob de chile am foun'. Steady, Dgawge, stan' steady, Dgawge Wash'n't'n."

Rising, he advanced to the spot from which the cry had come, and kneeling again beside the dog the thankful negro burst into tears and threw his arms about the dumb brute's neck. As he knelt thus the full moon slowly arose, for the night had half wasted away, and yet not until it threw a broad glare did patient Cupe give the command to move onward. Then he said: "Slow, Dgawge. Go t' Susie, Dgawge. Steady, ole man," and the dog leaped into the darkness.

The slow, creeping motion that had characterised the movements of Cupe during the night now changed to a trot; the steps were long, and he rapidly covered the ground. A howl came regularly from the throat of his unseen leader, a howl that to Cupe's practised ear was sufficient to keep him fast in the trail. He used his eyes to avoid obstructions, but relied solely on his ear to keep track of the dog. The moon rose high into the heavens; woodland, meadow, and thicket were trodden with no change in the cry of the dog, no sound from the lips of his master. The child had wandered in zigzag lines, had struggled through briars and bushes, over hills and through valleys — if, indeed, the dog were trailing the child. At last even Cupe grew doubtful, and whistled, which signal was understood as a command to stop. On reaching the brute, who in obedience rested in his tracks, the negro spoke as follows:

"Am yo' lyin', Dgawge, am yo' lyin' or tellin' de truff? Ef de chile hab been wha' yo' hab trabeled, de yinnecent hab walked her legs off. Am yo' lyin', Dgawge?" Stopping in the middle of the sentence, the speaker reached out his hand and picked from a briar a small piece of cloth, which he held before his eyes. The light of the moon fell full upon the fragment, and then Cupe completed the broken sentence — "An' heah

am de ansah — yo' am tellin' de truff. Go t' Susie, Dgawge, go t' Susie."

Back and forth, in and out, the man followed the cry of his dog that night, ever intent on the object of his search, hoping each moment to hear the bay announcing that the child had been found at last. But there came no change of note; the monotonous howl that first struck the ear was maintained, until at last a great loop had been made, and the step of the master, following the cry of the dog, turned toward a spot well known to the superstitious negro. Nearer and yet nearer they drew to the point that disturbed the mind of the slave, until at last he could no longer control his fear, but whistled to his companion, and together they came to a stand on the top of a grassy ridge.

"Yo' bettah go slow, Dgawge. Dah am dangah in de air ef yo' go into de hainted hollah widout de cha'm. God bress de rabbet what cross de paff an' send us back fo' de cha'm. Hole still, Dgawge;" and taking from his pocket a rabbit-foot attached to a string, the negro hung it around the neck of his dumb friend. He drew another rabbit-foot charm from the same pocket and threw it around his own neck. "Go slow, Dgawge, de debbil am in Bloody Hollah. God help de chile ef de debbil fin' her dah." The rabbit-foot charm even seemed not altogether to remove the distrust of the old man, who glanced uneasily about as he moved slowly into the valley. He mumbled to himself, possibly reciting a word charm, but still he kept bravely after the yelping hound.

At this point, when the dog had reached the base of the hill, he gave a yelp so different from the monotonous cry that had preceded it that even an inexperienced person would have noticed the change of tone. It was a

single, sharp yelp, followed by a loud, long cry that made the valley echo. The negro rushed forward, careless alike of ghost or goblin; and there, reclining on the grass, her head pillowed on a hillock that the slave knew only too well, was the object of the search.

The dog stretched himself upon the earth, licking the hand of his young mistress, and the moonlight threw its mellow rays over the hollow.

The frightened negro wasted no time; he raised the girl in his arms and rapidly left the valley of evil omens. His faithful dog, his night work at an end, weary and exhausted, with hanging head, followed at his heels. The grey of morning mingled with the moonlight as Cupe opened the door of his cabin, where old Dinah sat waiting for her husband. She gave a cry of joy as she recognised her young mistress; but Cupe, with the proverbial gruffness of such as he, said:

"Shet yoah mouf, yo' fool nigger, an' doan yo' wake de honey chile. Give Dgawge Wash'n't'n his suppah, fo' he hab done his wo'k."

CHAPTER XXVI

DESPONDENT STRINGTOWN

OBLIVIOUS to the occurrences related in the preceding chapter, Stringtown slept. Extraordinary events were required in 1864, to waken her people. The tramp of cavalry had become a familiar sound. A nocturnal raid had ceased to be novel. Long trains of army wagons, the curses of mule-drivers, the crack of black-snake whips, the sound of blows belabouring the backs of the patient brutes, were constant day and night along the dusty pike. The beating of drums, and the music of bands, the singing of enthusiastic men in bright new uniforms, the mirth that always accompanied the recruit marching South to "glory," sounded in the ears of our people so often as to excite no further comment. The tramp of veterans when transfer of commands brought old soldiers back from the war, men with whom the lack of bluster and of mirthful singing was in marked contrast to the behaviour of the new-made soldier, did not disturb us. One looked forward to waving flags, valiant cavalry charges, and pictured battle scenes in which, amid cheers of comrades, the waving banner was proudly carried on to the ramparts of the enemy: the other had known war in its reality; war which meant burned dwellings, weeping mothers, children huddled into groups, lands devastated, homes destroyed, distress and famine, pain and suffering to the innocent; and these experienced no ecstacy in thinking of battle charges where blood flowed from friend and foe, no pleasure in

reminiscences even of success where fire, smoke and death once prevailed. The places vacated by lost messmates, and the shrinking forms of suffering children and bereaved mothers, taught a sorrowful lesson to him who had taken part in war.

We of Stringtown slept during the passing of the squad of cavalry which Cupe saw tramping up the pike, and we also slept while the same raiding troop returned from a saddened household with a single prisoner, the rebel son of Mr. Nordman. And if Stringtown's people knew nothing of this tramping of a hundred horses, how could they have been aware of the stealthy footsteps of the old slave who that night had twice encircled their outskirts? Why should they awaken, when from a distance the old hound raised his voice beside the negro who searched for the lost footsteps of the wandering child?

But when morning came, with unabated energy the search was resumed. Aid was solicited from the country about, dogs were employed, but either the trail had cooled or the strange dogs were not gifted as was George Washington, for they found no trace of the wanderer's track. A party of seekers straggled to the cabin of Cupe, who sat as usual beside the cabin door, his old dog asleep at his side.

"Yo' doan p'tend t' say dat yo' hain't foun' de chile yit?"

"No signs of her. Lend us George; perhaps he can strike the trail."

"Yo' am welcome t' de dawg, but he am no 'count. He am like his ma'se. He doan trail de 'possum an' de coon now, he hain't got sense nuff in his ole head fo' huntin'. Go wid de gem'n, Dgawge; git up, yo' lazy houn', an' go wid de gem'n!"

The visitors whistled to the dog, which listlessly and with drooping head followed them from the door.

"Ya, ya," said Cupe, when the men had disappeared, "yo' am buhn'n yoah candle at de wrong end when yo' walk 'way from dis cabin. Yo' might es well look fo' an eah ob cohn wid thirteen rows es t' look fo' de gearl wha' yo' am gwine."

In a short time old George slunk back and resumed his former location. Cupe still rested beside the door; Dinah sat in the back doorway; no other person was to be seen.

Stringtown's search continued until, after several days had passed, hope departed from every breast. The child was given up as lost. Rumours arose that could not be traced to any authentic source, and yet were passed from mouth to mouth, to the effect that Susie had straggled to the pike and was found by a band of Northern soldiers marching south, who carried the homeless waif away. This rumour grew into accepted fact when a soldier on furlough, returning from the front, stopped at one of the Stringtown taverns and told of a child who, petted by her new-found friends, was now in the Army of the Cumberland.

CHAPTER XXVII

"RED-HEAD"

"TOOK yoah las' look at de ole plantation, Dinah, res' yoah eyes fo' de las' time on de lan' wha' yo' wha' bohn. De fragrance ob de cohn when et am in silk, de bread what yo' make wid de frosted 'simmon an' de cracklin', de sweet-'tatah an' 'possum am no moah fo' yo'. De lan' ob yo' fahdah am no moah yoah home; trial an' sorrah am t' come fo' de two ole niggers in de cole Canerdy country."

Dinah, sitting in the doorway, made no reply, and for a long time Cupe sat mute, lost in meditation.

"De ansah say dat de grabe hab cubbahed de body ob de missus an' de body ob de ma'se, an' dat de blos'm chile am dead an' buried an' dat Cupe hab done de long-made promise out. Et say dat when de dead am satisfied de backwa'd work ob man am done."

Dinah looked into the face of her husband and asked: "Am yo' suah de dead am satisfied?"

"Suah. Dinah, I is suah. De switch ob de weepin' willah tree droop down an' hang long obah de spot wha' Cupe stick de twig obah sweet missus' grabe; de cedah bough cubbahs de grabe ob de chile she call her blos'm. Dah am no yallah clay t' be seen, but dah am trouble yit. Dah am trouble com'n'.

"When Cupe go las' night t' wha' de ole house wah, he feel de touch ob de sperrit ob de dead. He look at de spot wha' de bed ob de missus stan' de night de blos'm wah bohn, an' he speak t' de missus like es ef she

wah by his side, an' den he lis'n fo' de ansah. Dah wa'n't no sound ob voice, but de ansah come out ob de air an' out ob de moonlight."

"What yo' see t' pint t' new trouble?"

"When I sahch in de bed ob de sage, dah wah many young sage plants growin'; dey am moah dan a ninch high. Et wah not a week sense Cupe scratch dat bed obah, an' now de seed am up. Dah am trouble fo' de man what plant de seed ob sage an' trouble fo' him who let de sage seed sprout." [1]

"De sage am a suah sign. But am de sperrit ob ole ma'se satisfied?"

Low and husky was the reply. "He am walkin' yit, but dat doan consahn us niggers. He swar' at de unbohn babe, he cuss de new-made muddah, an' he mus' walk fo' his own sins."

"An' Susie?"

"Et am fo' de good ob dat chile dat de change mus' come t' yo' an' me. Kin we keep her cubbahed ferebah? She am sittin' in de cabin in de mahn'n an' in de cabin in de ebenin'. She am in de cabin all day long. She go out wid Cupe in de night fo' a breff ob air, but de eyes am heaby an' de mist hang low. She mus' hab sunshine, an' dah ain't no chance heah."

"An' yo 'll lebe de home wha' yo' wah bohn, de lan' wha' yo' always lib, de grabe ob de ole fo'ks an' de chillun fo' de sake ob de strange chile?"

"Doan I tole yo' so?"

"But yo' am not yoah own ma'se, an' I am not yoah nigger. *Yo'* caint lebe an' I caint go."

"De papahs ob freedom wah drawn up by de missus befo' she go t' glory, de papahs am ready fo' de Co'ht."

[1] To plant sage seed is a sign of death or severe sickness to one of the family.

"Fo' bof ob us?"

"Fo' Cupe."

"An' yo' 'ud hab Dinah run 'way like de fiel' nigger do?"

"Dah ain't no use in yargyin' wid a woman," indignantly replied Cupe. "Shet yoah brack mouf, Dinah, git yoah duds ready fo' de long journey."

At this point a slight change in the intensity of the light in the room caught the eye of the alert old man. "*Tsh!*" he whispered, "dah am a shaddah on de flo'; tu'n yoah eyeball back, Dinah, an' tole me what yo' see befo' de back windah."

Cautiously the old woman raised her head so that a side glance could be taken of the window back of Cupe.

"Et am a boy."

"An' de head ob de boy am red, Dinah?"

"Suah."

"Wha' am Susie?"

"Playin' wid de gourd doll."

"An' de boy kin see de chile?"

"He am lookin' at de chile."

"De deed mus' be done; de Red-Head Boy hab seed de gearl, de spell am wo'kin'. Dgawge"—and Cupe addressed his sleeping dog—"Dgawge, *tsh!* tree 'em, Dgawge! tree 'em quick!"

Bounding through the open door, the dog made a circuit around the house, and at once a cry of distress came from the window where the head of the boy had appeared. Shuffling through the door and around the cabin, Cupe found the dog standing over the prostrate form of the "Red-Head" Boy.

"An' yo' hab come at las', yo' ebil-spell chile!" Cupe gave this welcome and glared down into the face of the defiant boy, who scowled back at the old slave.

"An' so de debbil hab sent yo' es de spell p'dicted, yo' red-head cuss. De spell what say dat Cupe an' Dinah an' de chile mus' lebe dere home, an' dat when de doah am closed at las' yo' will sit alone in de cabin."

Taking the prostrate boy by the ear, Cupe raised him to his feet, and face to face the two scowled a moment in silence. Then, still holding the ear firmly, the negro led the boy to the door of the cabin. "Brung my hat, Dinah, an' brung de bottle what stan' on de shelf."

"De bottle am empty."

"Did I ax yo' fo' a full bottle, yo' fool nigger? What fo' yo' talk back? Brung me de bottle on de shelf like I says."

This order brought the desired bottle, a pint flask. Putting it into his pocket, old Cupe spoke to the boy:

"Ef yo' fool wid Cupe, yo' am foolin' wid yoah life, yo' East Kaintuck scrub stock. What fo' yo' stop in God's country? Why doan yo' go on t' Posey County, Engiany, wha' de likes ob yo' belong?"

The boy made no reply.

"I wah stan'n' by de Stringtown pike when de wagon what held yoah debbilish carcass come down from de Kaintuck mount'ns, an' jes den de ho'ses stop fo' res'. Dah wah two scrawny ho'ses, foah dawgs, a coop ob chickens, a man an' woman, a lot ob dirty chillun, an' yoah red head."

No reply from the boy.

"An' when de quistion wah axed, 'Wha' yo' come from?' de ansah ob de man what dribe wah, 'East Kaintuck mount'ns.' An' when de quistion wah axed, 'Wha' yo' gwine t'?' de ansah wah, 'Posey County, Engiany.'"

Still there was no answer.

"Why yo' stop in Kaintuck, yo' red-head cuss?

Why yo' not go on t' Posey County, Engiany, wid de tribe what bring yo'?"

"Old Nordman is my uncle; I came to live with him," said the boy surlily.

"An' yo' brung shame on yoah uncle fo' habin' sech kin. Yo' come from East Kaintuck t' lib wid yoah Uncle Nordman, but de man who dribe dat wagon doan go on; he stop in de city an' jine in de blue coat army. De moonlight am not bright, but Cupe am a nigger — he kin see in de night. Dat feller wah de man who cap'ned de cavalry on de Stringtown pike de uddah night, when yo' slip from undah de tree an' whispah in his eah. He wah de man."

"I'll get even with yo', yo' black nigger, fer I've seen the girl, an' I'll tell where she es."

"Yo' will?"

"Yes, an' I'll get the fifty dollars too. Mr. Wagner hes offered fifty dollars fo' news of her."

"Pint yoah nose fo' home an' walk slow, yo' debbilish imp; ef yo' run, de teef ob de dawg 'll make yo' wish yo' had gone on wid de East Kaintuck litter an' crost de ribbah, wha' de likes ob yo' b'long."

The boy did not move nor say a word.

"Tu'n yoah face to'ard de pike like I tole yo'! Move, yo' sorrel top, er I 'll pull dis eah out by de root."

The boy sullenly obeyed, but it was evident that Cupe intended to accompany him. With the old dog in front and the negro close behind, they started for the village. Before reaching it, however, at the command of Cupe, the course was changed, and passing through the fields along the village outskirts the group reached the pike near the house of Mr. Nordman, who, as usual on summer afternoons, was sitting on the front porch of his home.

On entering the yard Cupe took off his hat, and bowed low to the owner of the house. After the usual salutations had been exchanged, he said: "Dah am sadness obah yoah face, Ma'se Nordman, an' I 'spec' dah am sorrah obah de heaht ob de missus t'-day."

"Yes, Cupe, we are in trouble."

"An' well yo' may sorrah, fo' dah am trouble in de house an' dah am trouble out ob de house. Yo' will 'scuse de nigger fo' sayin' et?"

"Say on."

"Yo' am sah'rin' fo' de chile, de rebel boy, what come t' see his muddah?"

"Yes."

"How come de Yankee sojers t' fin' out he wah home?"

"God only knows, Uncle Cupe. I did not think that I had an enemy in the world capable of stooping to such an act."

At this juncture the Red-Head Boy attempted to walk away. Cupe eyed him as he turned toward the corner of the house and mildly observed:

"Chile, yo' need n't go; bettah yo' stay an' heah de conbersashun out, case Cupe hab sump'n' t' show yo' in de pike when he go back." The boy took the seemingly artless words as a command; he returned reluctantly and sat down on the edge of the porch.

"De Stringtown fo'ks doan know de rebel boy wah home?"

"Yes; many of them called to see him, but no man in Stringtown would inform on him."

"His bruddah, Ma'se Jim, de Yankee cap'n, had be'n home too."

"Yes; they met by appointment."

"Yo' hain't no cause t' spishun none ob de niggers?"

"No, Cupid; not one but would have made any sacrifice for that boy. His old auntie is crying now in the cabin."

"Yo' hain't no cause t' spishun no one on de place an' no cause t' spishun no one in de town? Monstrous strange! I 'spec' de Yankees jes happen t' come in de night an' dey jes happen t' stop befo' yoah house. Pow'ful cu'yus. Dey station dere men at de back an' at de front ob de house — jes happen t' do it; dey make a ring ob muskets in de moonlight all 'roun' de mansion. Den dat loud knock come on de doah, de sleepin' chile wah pulled out ob bed, de han'cuffs slip obah his wrists, an' he wah put on de back ob one ho'se what jes happen t' hab an empty saddle."

"Yes, so it seems," answered Nordman meditatively.

"De sojers come wid only one empty saddle?"

No response.

"Dey go no fa'dah up de pike, but tu'n back ag'in?"

No reply.

"De niggers wah cryin', de muddah wah cryin', de ole man wah sw'arin' in hims heaht an' keepin' up a monstrous t'inkin', he am t'inkin' an' sw'arin' yit. But yoah t'inkin' doan do no good, de feller what tole on de boy am not foun'."

"No."

"Do yo' know who cap'ned de blue coats?"

"He did not come into the house. However, he only did his duty unless —" the old man paused.

Suddenly changing the subject, the negro said: "Yo' mus' 'scuse de pertness ob de quistions, but yo' know dat Cupe hab b'en in trouble too;" he held up his branded hand and displayed the livid mark in its palm, "an' dis am de fust chance he hab had t' git de inwardness ob dis painful yocasion. Cupe did n't come t' see

yo' t' be 'quisitive, he come t' ax ef yo' 'ud do him de kindness yo' hab done so offen?"

A smile came over the face of the old Kentucky gentleman, and he thumped with his cane on the floor of the porch. A negro lad, dressed in a single garment that was sleeveless, beltless, legless, (a Lindsey shift), in obedience to the call soon stood before him.

"Pig, take Cupe's bottle."

Cupe took the empty flask from his pocket and handed it to the lad.

"Fill it out of the second barrel in the far cellar."

Cupe made his best courtesy and the boy disappeared, to return shortly, holding the bottle filled with the amber liquid.

"T'ank yo', Ma'se Nordman, yo' liben de sperrit an' gladden de heaht ob de nigger. Ef yo' wan' Cupe t' sahve yo', a word am all yo' need say." He turned to go, then suddenly resumed the thread of his former conversation.

"Ef yo' fin' dat de feller what cap'ned de sojers know de chile wah home an' set de trap t' cotch him?"

"If I could find the scoundrel I 'd shoot him on sight."

"An' ef yo' fin' de feller what tole de sojers on de honey?"

"I 'll shoot him like a dog."

The old darkey chuckled, courtesied low and turned again to depart. Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, he said: "May de chile sittin' at yoah feet, de boy, yo' am so kind t' come t' de pike wid Cupe? Dah am a cu'yus track in de dust dat might yinterest de boy."

"Go," said Mr. Nordman.

Passing together to the edge of the pike, as if they were the best of friends, Cupe leaned over and pointed

toward the smooth furrows in the dust; but this was merely a blind, for no track was to be seen.

"An' yo' come from East Kaintuck wid yoah mount'n manners," he whispered. "Yo' eat yoah own kinfo'ks dah, yo' 'possum, an' yo' b'gin yoah debbilment heah by bitin' de han' ob de man what feed yo', an' who hain't no spishun ob de sin in yoah heaht. De wicked deed am done an' caint be undone, er Cupe 'ud squeeze yoah neck like es de pahson did de colonel." Pointing into the dust, the negro continued: "Yo' saw Susie in de cabin?"

The boy did not reply.

"Ansah de quistion; yo' saw Susie in de cabin?"

"Yes."

"Ef yo' say one word t' man er chile 'bout de gearl, Cupe 'll tole Ma'se Nordman 'bout what *he* saw when yo' meet de sojers on de Stringtown pike de night de raid wah made. Ef yo' whispah de fac' to any man Cupe 'll choke yoah life out fust, an' tell Ma'se Nordman 'bout who cap'ned de raiders second. So suah es God made Adam, yo' debbil from East Kaintuck, ef ha'm come t' de Susie chile, yoah red head 'll stop hatchin' debbilment in de lan' wha' yo' hab no bis'ness t' be. Min' yoah mouf now, keep yoah han' off dat fifty dollahs and sabe yoah neck."

Straightening up, Cupe courtesied once more to the gentleman on the distant porch, and, together with his dog, passed from sight.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SPIRITS

RETURNING to the cabin, the negro resumed his usual position in the chair beside the door, first, however, handing Dinah the bottle, which, in consequence of having been sampled on his return trip, was not now entirely filled. But before it reached her hand the wary old man put his finger on the vial, close to the upper surface of the liquid, and remarked: "De lickah am heah, yo' kin see de top mark; doan yo' let none ob et sweat fru de glass while Cupe am gone."

Long he sat in meditation, chewing wisps of tobacco which from time to time he stripped from the ever-present hand of the leaf above his head. Finally he arose, took a spade, and strode into the garden, back to the graveyard. Digging next to the foot-stone that marked the resting-place of his mistress of other years he unearthed a large closed stone jar. Removing the cover, he took out an oblong tin box, again covered the jar, returned the soil and carefully sodded the disturbed earth's surface. Taking the box in his arms, he carried it to the stable, and there thrust it into an empty meal sack, which he then threw over his shoulder. Returning to the house, he spoke to Dinah: "Yo' know de papah what de muddah ob Susie wrote an' lebe in yoah charge?"

"Yes."

"She say t' yo' dat ef de painfulness ob her life ebah

had t' be known, dat de papahs wah t' be used fo' de sake ob de chile."

"Dat am what she say."

"Brung me de papahs, Dinah; dat time am come."

Dinah hesitated.

"Doan yo' heah? Am yo' gittin' deaf er losin' yoah senses? Yo' bettah be keerful, yo' hain't got much sense t' lose."

Dinah dived her hand into the corner of the cupboard and produced a package neatly wrapped in newspaper, which she handed to Cupe, who placed it in the sack, which he threw across his shoulder and started for Stringtown. The old dog with nose against the ground trotting lazily at his heels. Dinah in the doorway watched the retreating figure. Mumbling to herself, and accompanying her voice with an occasional shake of the head, she stood long after the form disappeared; then returning into the cabin, she glanced at the little bed where Susie, tired of play, had carelessly thrown herself and fallen asleep. She hesitated a moment and then went straight to the mantel-piece, taking therefrom the bottle Cupe had brought from Mr. Nordman's. Carefully tying a thread around the bottle exactly on the top line of the liquid, she uncorked the vial, raised it to her lips and drank a deep draught, half emptying it; then, smacking her lips, she stepped to the water bucket, and poured water into the bottle until the liquid's surface struck the thread again, which latter she then removed. Finally she replaced the bottle on the shelf.

"Yo' am a sly old fox, Cupe Hardman, yo' am a sly ole coon, but Dinah—." Whatever she might have intended saying as a continuation of her soliloquy was lost, for, glancing at the little bed, she again caught sight of the sleeping face of Susie.

Dropping on her knees, the old negress clapped her lips upon the delicate hand that lay upon the white coverlet, murmuring:

"De win' blow cole an' de snow am deep in de Canerdy country; de nigger lub de Kaintuck sunshine, de sweet-'tatah an' de 'possum; de grabe ob de ole fo'ks an' de chillun am bery deah t' de brack fo'ks' heaht, an' de cabin an' de fren's what lib in ole Kaintuck am presh'us. But when Cupe say t' Dinah, fo' de good ob de chile, de deed mus' be done, Dinah 'll let de fiah go out on de cabin harf, an 'll close de cabin doah; she 'll took a las' look at de ole home, an' wid Cupe an' de honey chile 'll slip away in de night."

The head of the negress fell upon the coverlet, her eyes sought the bottle on the mantelpiece. For a long time she rested in this position, then attempted to rise, but irresistible languor held her in place. She reached up her hand, pointed to the vial, and wanderingly spoke: "Yo' wah sweet t' de taste, yo' honey bottle, but yo' caint tole Cupe nuffin, fo' de line am on de mark." Her eyes closed dreamily and she mumbled: "De Canerdy Lan' am cole an' de grabes ob de missus an' de chillun in Kaintuck am deah, but fo' de good ob de Susie chile an' de lub ob ole Cupe, Dinah 'll close de cabin doah ferebah."

CHAPTER XXIX

CUPE'S STORY OF THE PAST

TRUDGING through the gathering dusk of the evening, Cupe, with the sack on his back and the dog at his heels, reached the outskirts of Stringtown. He climbed the fence about one of the back lots, near one of the frame houses, and struck an alley-way, that led to the pike. Walking then along the sidewalk, he reached the door of Mr. Wagner. Once before, bearing the clothing of Susie, he had stood before that door, and having delivered his bundle had retreated with heavy heart. Now again with another bundle he stood on the same spot, hat in hand, his white head conspicuous in the gloom. Mr. Wagner opened the door, and recognising Cupe, invited him in.

"You may drop your sack by the side of the door; it will be perfectly safe."

"Ef et am de same t' yo', Ma'se Wagnah, I 'll sot et inside de room."

"Certainly, do as you choose."

Cupe not only "sot et inside de room," but he deposited it at his very feet, standing bareheaded beside the odd-looking package.

Mr. Wagner made no attempt to induce the visitor to be seated, knowing that Cupe's negro training would not allow him to sit in the parlour of a white man. Looking about the room, Cupe spied upon the wall a trinket that once belonged to Susie. Beginning the con-

versation after the manner of the negro, he addressed the trinket instead of Mr. Wagner.

"An' wha' es de Susie gearl what carry yo' in her han'? Am yo' lonesome in de silence, do yo' hs'n fo' de tongue ob de pert chile dat am gone?"

Mr. Wagner could but feel a pang of remorse. He knew that Cupe was speaking to him, though addressing the inanimate trinket.

Turning from that Cupe directly asked: "An' hab yo' hea'd any news from de honey gearl?"

"None, excepting the statement of the furloughed soldier, who saw a child in camp before Murfreesboro."

"An' did yo' send a man t' see ef et wah Susie?"

"Yes; but he could find no trace of her. The Army of the Cumberland is constantly changing its location, and there has been heavy fighting. Cupe, God knows that I thought I was doing my duty to the child. Would that she were in her old home with you again!"

"Yoah yintention wah good, Ma'se Wagnah, an' Cupe doan bear no blame t' yo'. De trouble wah dat yo' tried t' cross Prov'dence an t' bre'k de workin' ob de sign. Cupe hab t' say es how *he* am t' blame fo' de crime, an' not yo'."

"You, Cupid! Why, you begged for possession of your charge. Your pleadings brought tears to my eyes, your voice has never left my ears. Had I listened to you, Susie would have been happy in your cabin now."

"Et wah de Co'ht an' not yo', Ma'se Wagnah. Yo' did de biddin' ob de law, but de law am not es strong es de sign, fo' de sign am de biddin' ob God. Et wah Cupe who es t' blame, doan I tole yo', fo' he lose his head when de day ob trouble hove in sight."

"How were you to blame?"

"Ef Cupe had had his wits, he 'ud hab brought de sack yo' see on de flo'. De fool nigger lose his sense."

Mr. Wagner looked inquiringly toward the sack.

"Ef yo' 'll lis'n t' Cupe he 'll tole yo' what he should hab said de day yo' come fo' Susie."

"Go on."

Standing on the floor, the old man began his story. He forgot himself, he lost sight of his hearer, his tongue, keeping time with his vivid memory, became eloquent, as the words fell from his lips.

"De day what perish long ago wah gone. Et went into de da'kness when ole Ma'se Hardman wah foun' dead in Bloody Hollah. De niggers shet demselbs in de cabin, skeahed nigh t' deff. De witches wah plattin' de ho'ses' tail in de bahn, de owl wah sittin' in de top ob de hick'ry tree lookin' mighty wise, but sayin' not a word. De sign wah in de air, an' Cupe go out in de night an' look in de watah ob de spring an' read de word. Et say dat young ma'se 'ud die on de New Yeah night, es yo' know he did die, an' dat Susie chile 'ud come es she did come, an' et say moah dan dat; but yo' am consarned only wid what et say 'bout de chile. An' den de long yeahs pass, an' one mahn'n Cupe say: 'Ma'se, t'-morrah mahn'n 'bout day broke Bloody Hollah 'll mix etself ag'in in yoah affairs.'

"'Damn Bloody Hollah!' say de ma'se.

"'A chile 'll be foun' by de lone grabe.'

"'Shet up yoah nigger signs!' say de ma'se.

"'An' de chile 'll come an' stay in dis cabin.'

"'Close yoah lips, I tole yo'!' an', sayin' dat, ma'se walk off.

"But when de grey ob de mahn'n come, Cupe wah stan'n' by de doah ob de cabin, an' ma'se he op'n de doah an' walk out, es Cupe 'spected him t' do. He

look kindah queer when he see Cupe stan'n' dah, an' den he say: 'Cupe, yo' kin come wid me; I 'm gwine t' show yo' dat nigger signs am fool signs.' But Cupe, he know dat de omen wah wo'kin' on de ma'se, an' he keep his mouf shet, an' follud de ma'se, who go straight fo' Bloody Hollah. An' when ma'se an' Cupe stan' on de hill an' look fru de fog, sump'n' wah to be seed in de hollah, sump'n' dat in de grey ob mahn'n wah monstrous queer lookin'. Et wah on de Bloody Hollah grabe. An' ma'se he stop a minit kindah s'prised like, an' Cupe raise his han' an' pint down into de Hollah obah de shouldah ob de ma'se, an' say:

"'De signs am come'n true.'

"'Et am a cow,' say ma'se, an' tuhn back.

"'Et am not a cow, et am de chile pinted t' by de sign,' say Cupe. An' jes den de crittah rise up an' stan' on de grabe. Et wah tall an' slim an' red an' white, but de fog wah t'ick, an' only de colour an' de size could be seed. Et wah an awful sight, a skeery ting.

"'Et am not a chile,' say ma'se, an' he kindah shiver.

"'An' suah et am not a cow. Ef de sign am wrong et am monstrous queer,' say Cupe.

"An' so ma'se stan' skeered like, an' Cupe wah kindah sollum case de sign wah wrong. De crittah wah not a chile an' not a cow an' not like any uddah crittah. Jes den de breeze raise de fog, an' et show a lone woman holdin' sump'n' in her arms. De woman wah in a white dress, an' de bundle she hole wah red es blood. An' ma'se he look kindah cu'yus like at Cupe, an' den he swo' a cuss word, an' down into de Hollah he go, Cupe by his side. Befo' God, Ma'se Wagnah, et wah a lone woman, an' in her arms she hole Susie wrapped in a red shawl.

"An' ma'se he say kindah cross-like: 'Wha' yo' come from?' An' de woman pinted to'ard de Norf. An' ma'se, he ax: 'Wha' yo' gwine t'?' An' she look down at de grabe. Ma'se, he stop a minit an' den say: 'Yo' am not alone, uddah people am gwine 'long on de same road, an' de soonah some ob dem gets t' de end de bettah fo' de worl',' say ma'se.

"Den ma'se look at de chile, an' kindah see sump'n' in ets eye t' make him t'ink a minit es Cupe 'spected him t' do when he seed dem eyes ag'in. He tuhns on de woman sudden like an' say: 'What fo' yo' brung dat chile heah? Wha' yo' git dat chile?'

"An' de woman say: 'Yo' know de look ob de eye ob de chile? Wha' else kin de chile go?'

"'To de debbil, wha' ets fahdah gwine, de coward.'

"An' then ma'se look ag'in at de chile, an' say: 'De eyes ob de chile go back t' de day ets fahdah wah young. I see de sweet boy a-sittin' by my side ag'in. De dimple' cheek, de white skin. De eye ob de chile befo' me call back de day ob long ago.' Den he tuhn on de woman savage-like: 'Woman, I swo' once by all de gods an' debbils dat ef ebah de fahdah ob dat chile, er kin ob de fahdah, sot foot on de ole farm, ets life 'udn't be wuff de coppahs on a dead nigger's eyes. An' now yo' brung de ole times back, de times when de' — den he bre'k off — 'damn de ole times!' he say.

"De woman look down at de grabe an' cry. De chile look up into ma'se's face an' laugh, an' hole out ets little arms, an' den Cupe spoke, fo' he see wickedness risin' in ma'se's eye.

"'Ma'se, yo' swo' ef ebah de fahdah ob dat chile, er kin ob de fahdah, sot foot on de ole place yo'ud do mu'd'h.'

"'Yes,' say ma'se; 'an' one ob de varmints am heah

now, an' I 'tend t' choke de life out ob de brat.' He reach out his han', es ef t' grab de chile, an' den Cupe step betwixt de two. 'Hole yoah han'!' Cupe say, an' strike et down. 'De fahdah am not heah an' *de chile am not stan'n' on de groun'*. Yo' hab mu'd'h in yoah heaht, an' hab no right t' act out de oaff les'n de chile am stan'n' on de earf.'

"Ma'se stop a minit, an' den he say: 'Come t' de cabin!'

"An' de woman come. Dah wa'n't nuffin moah said, she jes come an' stay. De woman sleep wid de chile in de lof', an' Dinah sleep on de flo' ob de lof', an' Cupe sleep on de flo' ob de cabin room beside de bed ob ma'se. But de sign wah come true!

"Ma'se he keep away from de woman an' nebbah speak t' de chile fo' a long time. But he keep a monstrous lookin' at ets big, roun' eyes, an' moah dan once Cupe cotch de tear drops stealin' down his rough cheek. But Cupe doan say nuffin fo' feah et 'ud cross de sign.

"One day de muddah ob Susie say t' Cupe: 'Git me some writin' papah.' An' Cupe when he go t' Stringtown git a sheet. An' when he han' et t' her, she look at et kindah cu'yus like, an' say: 'Et am not nuff. I wan' t' write de story ob de chile.' An' Cupe nex' day git a whole pack ob big-size papah an' a dozen bright pencils. An' de muddah ob Susie take de papah an' write an' write. De days come an' go, an' she write an' write. Ma'se he doan say nuffin an' doan ax no quistions. He had n't any writin' sense. An' at las' de woman wrap de papah up an' write sump'n' on de outside ob de pack.

"Den nex' mahn'n she say t' ma'se: 'Dah am nusses wanted down in Tennessy.'

"An' ma'se he say: 'A namb'lance train fo' de Souf

am campin' in de fiel' by de pond ob Mr. Nordman now.'

"An' de woman say nuffin fo' a time, an' den she go t' de cupboard an' take from et de red shawl what Susie wah wrapped in de mahn'n she wah found in Bloody Hollah."

Cupe paused and turned his eyes to a tiny, well-worn shawl hanging from a peg in the wall, and in a solemn tone remarked, pointing with his finger as he did so: "Dah am de bressed gahment now."

Then he continued: "An' den de muddah took de chile in her arms an' cry. Ma'se he kindah feel dat sump'n' wah come'n, an' he say: 'De war am not fo' chillun.'

"De woman stop a minit, an' den she say: 'May de chile stay?'

"'Yes,' say ma'se; 'but ef de fahdah put foot on de place, dah 'll be a grabe dug; et 'll be fo' him er me.'

"Den she sot Susie in de little hick'ry cheer what Cupe done made fo' her, an' clime t' de lof' an' come down wid de bundle ob papah an' lay et on de table.

"'What am in de bundle?' ax ma'se.

"'A load ob sin.'

"She take from her pocket a little purse (Cupe held up a silk purse) an' she lay et on de papah an' say: 'Et am all I hab.' Den she pick Susie up an' kiss an' hug her an' cry obah her, an' Dinah cry an' ma'se an' Cupe kindah feel bery sollum' like. 'Doan none ob yo' follah me,' she say. 'De wages of sin am deff,' she muttah t' herselb, an' tuhn from de doah. But ma'se an' Cupe go out too, an' es de doah shet stan' by her side. 'What 'bout de papah yo' write?' ma'se ax.

"She stop an' look at ma'se an' Cupe, an' den she say: 'Ef ebah hahm pint t' Susie yo' kin use de

papah. Et 'll tole yo' wha' Susie hab de right t' lib an' et 'll gib de chile de libin' she am 'titled t' er et 'll brung shame t' de home ob a man who doan wan' no shame.'

"'What am in de papah?'

"'De story ob a life ob sin.'

"'An' de chile am mixed in de crime, de yinnecent chile?' Cupe ax.

"'Yes.'

"'Yo' lie, yo' lie, yo' muddah ob de chile,' ma'se say; 'dah nebbah wah sin on an unbohn babe, an' no sin hab come t' Susie sense she wah bohn.'

"'Et wah case ob de muddah's sin.'

"'Yo' lie ag'in! De muddah what bear de chile, de muddah what hole de chile t' her bos'm when de cussed man hide hims head, de muddah what face de shame an' face de worl' wid de chile in her arms am pure — by all de gods she am pure! Et am de man who sin', an' yo' know et, de coward who sneak off an' lebe yo' t' bear de chile alone, de cur who sit smilin' now. Et am nebbah de muddah wid de chile on her bos'm, but always de man who am de sneakin' dawg, de sinnin' brute, de coward!'

"Den de muddah ob Susie say: 'Ef yo' am right de worl' am wrong, fo' de worl' say de chile an' de muddah am de sinners. An' et wah case ob de sin dat I take my chile an' go 'way fo' de good ob de fahdah, who am safe.'

"'But,' she go on, 'ef trouble rise up an' yo' wan' Susie t' stay in de cabin, let de story be read. De man who de papah pints to 'll send money.'

"'Damn de man an' damn his money!' say ma'se. 'Nebbah yo' min' de money; when yo' am back from de war yo 'll fin' de chile in de cabin, an' dah 'll be a place fo' yo'; but no place fo' his dirty money.'

"She turn t' go, den she stop ag'in. 'Be keerful who reads de story; et am not fo' scandal tongue,' she say. An' den she walk 'way. She go alone t' de yamb'lance train!" Cupe stopped.

"And did you hear nothing from her afterward?"

Cupe took from his pocket-book the clipping of a newspaper, which Mr. Wagner read aloud:

A NURSE KILLED

A shell from a rebel battery near Dallas, Georgia, Tuesday morning struck and instantly killed a nurse. She came in an ambulance train from Kentucky, but nothing is known of her history. Heedless of her own safety, she moved about the field, succouring the wounded of both armies. Careless of herself, in the thick of battle, while holding a canteen of water to the mouth of a dying soldier, her life was suddenly destroyed. Nothing that could give a clue to her identity was found among her meagre effects, nothing but an addressed, stamped envelope, in which was a request that in case of her death a simple statement of the fact be mailed in the same envelope, and that no effort be made to find her friends. Only this and the following request added as a postscript: "Please lay me out in white."

As Mr. Wagner ceased reading, Cupe broke in:

"She say, 'De wages ob sin am deff,' an' she am dead, but befo' God, de sin wah not hern."

"A sad story, Cupid, but it is told too late. The mother is dead, the child is lost."

"Ef de chile could be foun', Ma'se Wagnah?"

"Impossible!"

"'Ud yo' gib de keepin' ob de chile t' de brack fo'ks?"

"The child is *gone*."

Cupe leaned over, opened the sack at his feet, took from it the oblong package of manuscript handed him by

Dinah, and said: "When de candle am lighted t'-morrah ebenin' in de grocery Cupe 'll come t' de grocery-store meetin'. Yo' hab de papah written by de woman lyin' in de battle groun' ob Georgia. Ef yo 'll read de lines p'raps yo' would raddah de chile stay wid de nigger."

The negro turned to the door: "De writin' am only fo' yo'; et am none ob Stringtown's consahn." The door closed and Mr. Wagner retired to his room.

When morning broke, the village clerk sat in his chair; the manuscript before him had been read a second time; his head rested on his hand, the lamp still burned, for Mr. Wagner, in deep reflection, gave no thought to the passage of time.

CHAPTER XXX

CUPE PURCHASES HIS WIFE

CUPE after leaving Mr. Wagner did not go directly home. Instead, with the sack over his shoulder, he sought the dwelling of Judge Elford. Once before he had passed from door to door of these two houses, and this second reception at the home of Judge Elford was nearly a repetition of the first one. The negro was invited into the sitting-room, and in kindly tones asked to state his business.

Glancing about, he threw in a side remark, by way of introduction:

"De bot'm ob de cheer yo' wah sittin' in am in trouble ag'in. Ef yo 'll let de nigger took et home, he 'll put in a new bot'm?"

"All right, Cupe," said the judge, knowing well that this was not the business which brought his caller at that hour.

"Et am many yeahs sense Cupe larn' t' bot'm cheers. De cohn-shuck twist am hardah dan de hick'ry strip, an' de hick'ry bot'm las' de best."

"Let it be a hickory bottom."

"Lawd, de dimes an' qua'tahs what Cupe made bot'min' cheers fo' Stringtown fo'k," the old darkey remarked, and reached again into the sack; taking therefrom the heavy oblong tin box, he stepped deferentially to the desk of the judge and placed it before him, inserted a tiny key into the lock, turned it, raised the lid and stepped back.

Beneath the cover lay a neatly folded paper, which Judge Elford opened and read at Cupe's request. Then he looked in surprise at the negro and remarked:

"Your freedom, Cupe, you are a free man! These papers were drawn up fifty years ago; they are properly signed and witnessed."

The old man chuckled. "Dah am 'nuddah papah," he said.

"Yes," the judge continued, reading again: "This paper is a bill of sale. In consideration of twelve hundred dollars, to be paid by Cupid Hardman to the legal heir of your recent master, Dinah is to be freed."

Again the negro chuckled: "An 'll yo' count de money in de box?" He leaned over, by an effort carefully inverted the box on the desk, and raised it. Within were coins of every size and description. The astonished judge, though rejoicing in his humble friend's triumph, was reluctant to undertake the tedious task suggested by the negro, who himself realised that it was a task.

"Dah am 'zac'ly twelve hund'd dollahs. Yo' kin take yoah time t' count et." The wrinkled fingers of the slave playfully stirred the medley of coins. Picking up a silver dollar, Cupe scrutinised it closely, saying: "De mark am on yo' yit — de mark ob de file. Kin yo' memberlec' de night yo' wah handed to Cupe, de night ob de shiveree? De bright young missus in de house on de pike han' yo' t' Cupe, an' say: 'Fo' waitin' on de table, Cupe.' God bress her sweet face! Cupe sees her yit es she smile at de nigger dat wed'n' night, de night she marry Ma'se Nordman. But de face am sah'rin' now — one chile wearin' de Blue, de uddah wearin' de Grey."

Unwrapping the tissue paper from a five-dollar gold

piece, Cupe abruptly addressed the judge: "Did yo' ebah see dis shinin' piece befo'?" Then continued, without waiting for an answer: "An' why should yo' know de coin from ets bruddahs? Yo' hab seed many like et, suah. But Cupe mahked dis beauty, an' heah am de mahk." He pointed to a tiny cross. "Do yo' min' de day Cupe hole de strap an' let de coffin ob de missus down into de earf? An' do yo' min' dat es Cupe pass yoah doah dat night yo' came out an' slip de shinin' gol' into his han'? Dis am dat coin, Ma'se Elford." Cupe turned it slowly between his fingers. "Et am es bright es de day et wah buried, an' de face ob de angel missus in Heaben am shinin' bright es dat gol'. De grabe caint rub de shine off de gol' yo' gib in her name. But dah ain't no use in sech memberlectins. De money am all honest now, fo' Cupe made et square, but de Lawd knows wha' some ob et hab be'n."

The negro paused in his speech, and fingered the gold. The judge was silent. Evidently his thoughts were in the solemn past, which had been recalled by Cupe's artful tongue. By and by he asked: "Is this money for the purpose of buying your wife, Dinah?"

"Et am. Dis nigger hab be'n sab'n' de money fo' de pu'pose. De patch ob t'backah what he raise in de Satuhday afternoon am buhned long, long ago; de rabbet what he sell t' Stringtown fo'ks am gone, an' pow'ful many ob de fo'ks what eat et am dead; de cheer bot'ms what Cupe put in hab been wo'n out, but de money dey brung am safe. Yo' kin count et at yoah ease, Ma'se Elford; et am all dah." He turned to the door.

"Take the papers, Cupe, your own and Dinah's freedom papers." The negro hesitated. "Ef et am de same t' yo', Ma'se, de papahs an' de money may stay t'geddah. Mebby dah won't be no use fo' de papahs.

Cupe doan wan' no disgrace on his head, an' doan 'tend t' hab no disgrace."

"Explain your meaning."

"Ef some mahn'n de cry come t' Stringtown dat Cupe an' Dinah am gone, ef de cabin am empty an' de doah locked, ef dah hain't be'n no good-bye said, de fo'ks ob dis heah town 'll 'cuse Cupe an' Dinah ob stealin' demselbs an' runnin' 'way t' Canerdy. Ef sech tings come will yo' stan' in de co'ht an' show dat freedom papah ob Cupe an' count de money he pay fo' Dinah into de box ob de co'ht?"

"I will."

"An' sabe de honah ob de two ole slabes?"

"You may depend upon it."

Again Cupe turned to the door, and again he stopped. "But ef Cupe an' Dinah keep libin' in de cabin, bettah yo' keep de papahs an' de money, an' keep all de fac's t' yo'selb; an' ef Cupe an' Dinah die in de cabin, de papahs am t' be read by de preachah at de grabe's side, fo' Cupe wan's t' go into Heaben free, an' t' hab a free wife too."

"And the money?"

"De money am fo' Susie, ef she ebah am foun'."

"Susie is gone forever."

"Do yo' 'member what Cupe tole yo' de night he stan' in dis room an beg fo' de chile?"

"Yes."

"He say: 'De *law* say dat de chile caint lib wid Cupe, but de *sign* say dat she mus' lib wid Cupe.' An' Susie am gone ferebah, yo' say, but Cupe b'lebe in de sign, an' Cupe say dat she am not gone, but 'll come back when de law am out ob de way."

"What do you mean, Cupe?"

"'Ud yo' let her stay wid de brack fo'ks ef she wah t' come back?"

The judge looked quickly at the earnest old slave and a sudden light came over his face. "Yes," he impulsively added, "if Susie is found her home may be with you until she asks to go elsewhere."

"An' so God am greatah dan de law," said Cupe. "Yo' may fold dem papahs 'way, Ma'se, case Cupe doan 'tend t' be freed. Ef he wah a free man he could n't stay in de cabin. Et am monstrous pleasant t' be a slabe an' not t' worry obah de rent er feed. Et am pow'ful satisfyin' t' de soul t' open de eyes in de mahn'n an' see de cohn a-growin' an' heah de chicken an' de duck crowin' an' a-talkin' an' t' know dat de flour sack an' de meal bah'l am full. Cupe an' Dinah 'll jes wait in de cabin an' be slabes 'til dey die, an' ef Susie comes back t' Stringtown she 'll fin' de cabin doah open an' de cubbah spread on de table. Jes sot de money to 'side fo' her in case ob a rainy day, an' read de papahs ob freedom obah de grabe ob de niggers, an' den gib de money t' de Susie chile." Cupe backed out of the room and closed the door behind him.

The lamp that threw its light over the open book wherein Mr. Wagner once had read the lines that saved Cupe, "By Right of Clergy," lighted the desk, now weighted with coin collected during that man's many days of bondage. As the door closed the judge murmured: "Thank God the negro has found the child, but how can I explain to Mr. Wagner that he must give up Susie?"

CHAPTER XXXI

"A FEARFUL SIGN"

THE edge of winter, moving down from the North, had brought mist and cloud. The air of the day just passed had been saturated with gloom and shade. The clouds hung low; they scraped the tree-tops in the woodland on the hill, but no rain had fallen from their sombre folds. Instead, cool breezes arose that grew cooler as the day sped and fairly cold when evening came. If the sun moved across the heavens that day no ray from it reached the earth. The preceding night had turned directly into leaden day, the dreary day had worn itself out and disappeared in gloom; there had been no twilight of morn or eve, there had been no blending of light and darkness.

When Cupe stepped into the house of Mr. Wagner it was still daytime, yet the lamp was lighted; when he stepped out again night had come, but no brighter lamplight was needed than before the day had fairly sped.

There was no moon, but had there been a full moon high in the heavens no ray could have pierced that thick cloak. The heavens and the earth were hidden from sight. When Cupe left the door of Judge Elford the darkness above and below had run together; distance had disappeared; there was no near, no far.

Never before had that night-loving man felt the

weight of darkness. He stood in the street and rubbed his eyes, opened them wide, muttered and stood expectant, but saw no light save an occasional window gleam, which served but to deepen the surrounding blackness.

"Et am monstrous strange fo' a nigger t' be caught by de da'kness, et am s'prisin' cu'yus. When a nigger sleep et am in de sunshine; de sof'ness ob de sunshine am soovin' t' de eye. When de night-time come, de cat, de dawg, de coon, de 'possum an' de nigger am on dere feet. De night-time am de time fo' de brack man t' be awake, de daytime am de time fo' de nigger t' sleep. An' so et wah in de hot Guinee country Cupe's gran'dad come from, when eb'ry creature sleep in de day an' run in de night. Dat habit am wid de nigger yet."

Cupe struggled along, aided by the slender light that came from an occasional window, until he turned into a field below the village. Then impenetrable darkness closed in upon him; the tree-top, waving above, made no mark against the sky, the horizon gave no streak to lighten the gloom; above and below the deepest darkness reigned.

Suddenly to the right he caught sight of a moving light that floated slowly in a horizontal direction over the earth, seemingly a few feet above its surface. The eyes of the negro were riveted on the phenomenon, which — a globe of light, not a flame — flitted in and out of sight as it passed behind a clump of bushes or a tree trunk, to reappear again. Following the undulating surface of the ground, it moved steadily along, now to the right, now to the left, but ever onward toward the spot where stood the man whose eyes were fixed on the strange illumination, which was neither spark nor flame

nor any form of fire. There was no wind. The negro thrust a finger into his mouth, withdrew it and held it in the air above his head, but no touch of coldness came to either side; and still the glimmer flittered back and forth, careless alike to path or road, drawing closer with each change of direction.

When but a few feet from the negro its direction changed, and then for the first time it started straight for his person, floating about a foot above the earth. This final action was responded to by the old man, who, until this time, but for the single movement by which he had tested the wind, had stood like a statue. With a motion strangely rapid for one so aged, he jerked his coat from his person, quickly turned the sleeves wrong side out, and then drew it on again. The globe of light vibrated as if in response to the action, tremulously moved up and down like a lantern in a wave-rocked boat, then turned to the right, passed about five feet from the negro, and proceeding now in a direct line disappeared in an adjacent thicket.

"Yo' cussed Jack o' Lantern, an' ef yo' had got on dis nigger's back yo' 'ud hab rode him 'til mahn'n. But Cupe know how t' circumbent yo', yo' debbil's light. No Jack o' Lantern dare tech de man who w'ars de coat wrong side out. Yo' sly cuss, yo' wabbled about es ef yo' wah not keerin' fo' de nigger, but yo' caint fool dis chile. Lawd, but et wah a close call; fo' ef yo' had come from b'hin', yo' 'ud hab jumped on de nigger an' rode him till de light ob day. Niggers hab be'n cotched by de Jack o' Lanterns and rode all de libelong night, obah de hill, fru de briars an' in de grabeyard. An' when dey come home in de mahn'n, tired an' near 'bout dead, de ma'se say dey hab be'n out t' a shindig dance; but et am God's fac' dat de Jack o' Lanterns cotch

niggers what doan know de coat sign, an' ride 'em like es ef dey wah ho'ses." [1]

His quick ear caught a familiar sound, the breaking of brush, caused by the motion of an animal in a briar patch. A smile broke over his face and he joyously called out, "Come heah, Dgawge!" and the dog's cold nose soon touched his hand and his side rubbed against the negro's leg. Reaching his hand into his pocket, the slave took therefrom a roll of twine; one end of the string he tied about the neck of the dog, the other he held in his hand. "Keep in de paff an' go home, yo' fool!" ordered the master, and together man and dog moved onward. "Dis am a monstrous shame t' any nigger, an' t' t'ink dat Cupe should ebah feel de disgrace ob such a ting es dis. Et am lucky dat et am night, fo' de shame am moah dan Cupe could bear in daylight. But de dawg caint tole nobody, an' nobody but de dawg am heah t' see de shame ob de nigger. Et am a monstrous shame, an' et am a fearful sign; de Lawd only knows de meanin' ob sech a sign."

[1] If the old negroes did not believe that to wear a coat wrong side out would protect them from the "Jack o' Lantern" they affected as much. They also affected to believe that the negro caught by one would be ridden until morning.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE SPIRITS AFFECT DINAH

STEP by step these companions, the faithful brute and the bonded slave, had journeyed from Stringtown, until now the dog's nose was prone against the front door of the cabin, which Cupe could not see. "Dah hab be'n f'mil'ar signs 'long de paff, but de dawg caint talk an' de da'kness ob night am cubbahin' de way. Dah wah a roun' rail on de las' fence we climbed, et wah suah de fence what once stood befo' de cabin, but dah ain't no cabin heah. Ef de ebil sperrits hab mobed dat fence an' bent dat paff t' fool de ole man, dah am trouble befo' his steps, an' he mus' move monstrous keerful. De debbil may be restin' at de end ob dis walk. An' de dawg won't move no moah. Et am de fust time dat dawg hab gone back on his ma'se. Go home, Dgawge Wash'n't'n!" A jerk at the string, and the dog in reply bayed long, tremulously, and stood still, his nose close against the cabin door. "Et am a painful howl yo' am makin', Dgawge. I hab nebbah hea'd sech talk befor'. De voice yo' speak when yo' tree de coon, de 'possum er de rabbet am plain, but Cupe nebbah hea'd yo' talk befo' like dis. What yo' see t' make sech talk es dat? An' only t' t'ink ob de shame ob de nigger." Suddenly he raised his head, snuffed the air, and dropped the string. "Et am t'back, et am de han' ob backey what hang 'side de cabin doah. De smell am not t' be mistook'n." Again he snuffed the air. "Et

am de cabin yo' hab treed, Dgawge; yo' nebbah treed de cabin befo', an' dat es why yo' talk so strange." Reaching out his hand, the door was found, and Cupe at once gave a loud rap. There was no response. Again he knocked, with no better result. Cupe slowly moved his fingers over the door. The latch string hung out. "Befo' de Lawd, an' what am de mattah wid Dinah!" Opening the door, he groped about inside, reached the mantelpiece, struck a match, and lighted the candle. The child lay asleep on the little bed. Dinah, with head thrown back so that it rested on the edge of the bed, lay sprawled upon the floor.

"By de bones ob my gran'pap!"

No other word did Cupe utter, — that unusual expression, a relic of his old master, expressed the depth of his surprise. Stepping to the prostrate form, he held the candle before the sleeper's lips; the flame leaned outward; breath was there. Raising it slightly, he moved the light back and forth before her eyes. No movement. "Et am monstrous strange," he muttered. Kneeling, he placed his nose close to her lips, and at once a scowl spread over his black face. "De cause am cleah ef de night am da'k." Cupe stepped to the mantelpiece, and grasping the bottle, held it before the light. "De cause am not so cleah," he mumbled, as he saw that the surface of the liquid marked the exact spot where he had left it. Shaking his head, the old negro uncorked the bottle and raised it to his nose: "Et am lickah." He thrust the neck into his mouth, his flabby lips sucked about the shoulder of the bottle, gurgle after gurgle followed, and when he replaced the flask more than half the contents had disappeared, "Et am a shame," he muttered, "et am a shame dat a gem'n mus' swallah so much watah fo' so little lickah."

Grasping Dinah by the shoulders, Cupe gave her a violent jerk, which raised her fairly upon her feet; and as she opened her eyes, he thrust the woman upon a wooden-bottomed chair with a shock that brought her to consciousness. Standing before her, Cupe shook his fist close to her face and said, in a deep, dramatic tone:

"Dah am direful signs t'-night; dey come from in de cabin an' out ob de cabin, from de air an' from de earf."

Dinah, dazed and drowsy, only stared back at the old man, who continued: "De signs am t'ickenin' an' pintin', but de debbil only knows wheddah de end am good er bad."

Still no reply.

"But de signs am not so worryin' es de nigger's disgrace."

"What disgrace?" queried Dinah, rubbing her eyes.

"Dah hab be'n double disgrace on Cupe dis night."

"What done disgrace yo'?"

"Cupe hab queered hisse'f, fo' he hab be'n los', an' yo' hab brung disgrace t' him too."

"Dah hab be'n no disgrace ob yoah wife, ef yo' hab be'n los'," retorted Dinah, with offended dignity.

"Dah hab be'n two disgraces ob Dinah. Yo' hab be'n drunk, an' yo' hab stol'n lickah. Dah am no wussah a sin dan t' steal lickah."

"Befo' God, Cupe Hardman, dis nigger hab n't seed ner teched a drop ob lickah fo' a yeah!"

"An' dah am now anuddah disgrace, fo' yo' hab tole a lie. De debbil hab got yo,' suah."

"De bottle am jes' es yo' lef' et, Cupe Hardman; et am on de mantelpiece an' am full." She turned her eyes to the vial, and was startled to find it half emptied.

"De bottle am 'witched; et wah full t' de line," she added.

Cupe held up his hand, motioning her to cease speaking, but the alarmed woman continued :

" De ebil sperrits am in de house, dey hab be'n in et all day. When Dinah heat de graby in de skillet an' poah de watah out ob de cup into et, de skillet fly into pieces. De debbil broke dat skillet, suah."

" Yo' wah drunk, yo' fool, an' dreamed yo' poahed watah into de skillet, but yo' poahed et into de bottle. Yo' drunk a gill ob whiskey, an' den yo' fill de bottle up wid watah, an' hab be'n dreamin' like a drunken nigger dreams. De debbil 'll git yo' lyin' soul." Dinah pointed to the hearth, where fragments of the vessel were scattered. " Do de dream bre'k a skillet ? "

Cupe, more disturbed by the evidence of the broken skillet than he cared to admit, said solemnly : " Yo' hab be'n pow'ful wicked. Yo' know yo' drunk de lickah."

" An' what ef I did took a drop, yo' hain't no cause t' jaw. Yo' bettah clean yoah own toof befo' yo' pick Dinah's."

" What yo' mean t' 'sinuate ? "

" Wha' yoah million patch, Cupe Hardman ? "

" What yo' talkin' 'bout ? "

" De night de fust singer sit in de tree an' sing, six weeks ago t'-morrah night, yo' slip out ob de cabin an' wah gone 'bout an hour. Yo' come back wid two watah-millions in de meal sack 'cross yoah shoulders."

" De cause am easy t' 'splain."

" Yo' got no million patch, yo' stealin' nigger."

" I tole yo' de cause am easy t' 'splain. De million yo' foun' in one en' ob de sack wah growin' cross de paff, an' Cupe jes ease de paff, fo' feah et hurt some fellah's foot."

" But de uddah million."

" De sack wah lop-sided den, an' Cupe could n't

carry et. Et wah a sin t' waste de fruit, so he go back an' eben de weight by slippin' ets mate from jes inside de fence an' put et into de uddah end."

"Bettah yo' say nuffin 'bout de drop ob lickah, Cupe. Et wah pow'ful sweet t' de taste, an' so wah de millions. Dinah taste em bof, an' am gollified t' speak."

"Dinah, fo' de sake ob de smoove argyment yo' make, dah will be fergibness dis once, but ef ebah yo' does sech a ting ag'in, so suah es my name es Cupe Hardman I 'll sole yo' down Souf."

"Yo 'll sole me Souf, yo' nigger! yo' bettah own yo'selb befo' yo' talk 'bout solin' uddah fo'ks!"

"Dinah, yo' am in my pocket. I bought an' paid fo' yo' t'-night, an' ef ebah yo' disgrace yoah owner ag'in es yo' hab dis night, yo' bettah look out, fo' de tramp t' Georgy am sahtin suah."

"An' hab yo' bought yo'selb too?"

"Yes."

"De Lawd be praised, Cupe! I know yo' hab be'n sabin' money fo' fifty yeahs, an' I know yo 'll use et when de time come. Ef we am free niggers, we kin walk t' Canerdy in de daylight."

"Et am de sacred truff, Dinah; yo' hab got sense nuff t' see in de daytime, ef yo' am a woman. A woman am like a dish-rag, Dinah, she am monstrous convenient in her place, but ef she git out ob et she ain't wuff nuffin t' nobody. Doan yo' fergit yoah place, Dinah."

This diversion changed the current of Cupe's thoughts, and he dropped at once the subject of Dinah's failings and recurred to his personal misadventure.

"Dah wah 'nuddah sign, an' et wah a disgrace t' Cupe. His eyes wah los' t'-night, an' de nigger had t' tie hisse'f t' de dawg t' fin' de cabin."

"Wah yo' drunk?" The wife's eyes twinkled.

"Et wah sperrits suah, but ebil sperrits, not lickah, an' de en' am not yet."

"P'raps de same ebil sperrits shet yoah eyes, Cupe, what take de lickah out ob de bottle t' git Dinah into trouble."

"Zacly," said Cupe ironically; "but yo' bettah be keerful dey doan do et ag'in. De bodin' signs am thick'nin' up. Keep yoah eyes peeled, an' be ready, fo' ef de workin' ob de sign am ebil, de cabin doah 'll close, an' yo 'll staht wid Cupe fo' de Norf in de night-time."

CHAPTER XXXIII

OLD JEW MOSE AND SAMMY DREW

THAT night I sat in our home by my mother's side, brooding over the humiliations my apparent dullness daily brought upon me at the Stringtown school. Hitherto I had borne the stigma in dumb, indifferent, careless fashion, but as perceptions quickened, my shortcomings that had long been manifest to others, suddenly flashed into mental view. Shame reddened my brown cheek, and realizing that the Stringtown school was no longer the place for me, I implored my mother to allow me to seek instruction elsewhere. Never in Stringtown could I win the respect of my comrades nor of myself, nor regain the ground that had been lost. That distasteful front row at school, where I sat among the little boys, — the hateful scene, daily enacted, left an indelible impression upon me, and all these humiliations were vivid at this moment. At last it became impossible to restrain my grief and I cried in despair, "I cannot go back, I cannot, I cannot!"

"But," pleaded my mother, "we are very poor. By close economy we can live here where we own the little home your father left us; elsewhere we would starve. God has blessed us with health; for this be thankful, we cannot ask him for wealth." Tears streaked their way down my cheeks, but under the soothing tones of my mother's voice the gush of grief had given place to a mood of seriousness.

At this point in our conference a knock interrupted

the scene, and when I opened the door Mose the Jew entered. His smiling face gleamed in the lamplight, and by invitation he seated himself at my side.

Mose was dressed in his holiday garments, and, perhaps in order to suppress our curiosity on that account, he told us that he was returning from the city. Once a year, every September, Felix Moses, in a new suit of clothes, met in religious ceremony with his own people in Cincinnati. But, so far as we knew, until the next fall he did not again seek the house wherein his kinsmen worshipped. On his return from the present trip he had sought our home; and so unusual was it for him to visit a townsman except on business, as to cause both my mother and myself secretly to wonder. Divining our thoughts, Mose soon enlightened and likewise amazed us.

"To-morrow night I shall start to join the rebel army."

"You, Mose?" exclaimed mother.

"Yes. I have sold my horse and wagon, collected my accounts, bought a young horse and outfit, and six of us start South to-morrow night."

"You are neither young nor a fighting man and your people do not love war."

"I am of the tribe of Judah. My people love peace, but have taken part in war since the beginning of history. Our wealth has contributed to the maintenance of the cause of all nations and our bones have whitened the battlefields of every land, ancient and modern."

"But this war is not of the Jews' making."

"We are at home in all countries, and the Jew makes sacrifices for the right as he sees it."

"Your people are mostly in favour of the North; do any of your Jew friends champion the South?"

"Old Man Nordman has a son in each army; who can say which son is in the wrong?"

Evidently the man had considered the subject from every side. He rose to depart — held out his hand — and as he did so, took from his coat pocket a package and handed it to mother, saying — "Your child has no longer a father," he said sadly. "I know that you built great hopes on the money that was to come to you by the will of the Corn Bug. But that is lost. I have no use for money now, I may never return, and if I do I can begin anew. Use the money you find in this package to educate the boy."

Some spot in every life is sacred; neither pen nor tongue should touch the *arcanum* that lies in some of these depths.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE VILLAGE CIRCLE OF STRINGTOWN

A CLEAR sunset ushered in the next night, the evening that brought the first frost of the season. Mist and cloud were brushed away by a wind from the north, which left the air sparkling and crisp. The voices of the green-winged singers that for six weeks had joyously chirped in tree and shrub, and their relatives, the katydids, that during the summer had called and answered each other, were hushed. No rustling leaves, no cry of insect, no motion of bush, broke the still, crisp night. Great was this contrast to the shrieking blast, the banging shutters, the creaking sign and the beating sleet, that rang their changes when our village circle had met, ten months ago.

The quiet air, penetratingly cold, spoke of frost and foretold that slivers of ice before morning would surely form in the shallows of exposed hoof-tracks. For weeks the swallows had been flocking in the meadows. Their noisy chirps but the day before had sounded in the ear of the passer-by. Gathering from their nesting places, these glossy songsters during the summer had collected into great flocks. The tops of the dead trees about the meadow pond of Mr. Nordman were black with their glittering forms. Never before had they seemed so noisy. But when next morning broke, the upstretched branches were bare, the field was deserted. Buried in the cloud depths above and out of sight of man, they

had risen in the night and turned their eyes to the South.

As a rule, few stars could be seen of a summer evening through the heavy-laden atmosphere. But now, responsive to the crisp, transparent night, numbers of tiny points sprang into view and twinkled. The star-built sickle, which during the early part of June crossed the meridian in the evening's twilight, now had sunk below the western horizon. The Great Dipper, which during the early summer evenings had balanced itself over the meridian's line, the bowl west, the handle east of it now, low in the north, hung just above the earth's edge The milkmaid's path, which in June had started from the northwest, marked its way close to the eastern horizon, to slope down and disappear in the southeast, was now a broad, white band overhead, extending across the sky from the northeast to the southwest.

One by one the members of the Circle "dropped" into place that frosty Saturday evening, until, when the lamps were lighted, most of the inverted nail kegs upon which the villagers seated themselves were occupied. The clerk, Mr. Wagner, sat in his mutilated chair; Judge Elford balanced himself upon his one-legged seat, and Professor Drake, book in hand, sat on his bookcase high stool, beneath the lamp.

But in the shadow cast by the stove-pipe, Cupe slipped quietly early in the evening, and stood in the corner. Whenever the door opened he was screened from sight, but his willing hand closed the door after each newcomer. Down the aisle, before the counter, stretched the only vacant strip of floor unbroken by stool, keg or other obstacle. It was the reserved spot where stood the grocer's patrons while their packages of tea, sugar and other trifling purchases were being

wrapped. Recognising the business right of the proprietor, the circle invariably reserved this space for his convenience.

Suddenly when there was a pause in the talk the quiet, frost-breeding air brought to our ear the click of metal striking against stone. At the sound all listened with raised heads. Cupe softly turned the knob and opened the door slightly, lapping his ear over the edge. They had not long to wait, for soon the clatter of many hoofs beating the stones of Stringtown pike came through the still night air. Only one word was spoken: "*Yankees*." The grocer stepped to where I sat, grabbed the armoured saddle, dragged it from beneath me and thrust it hastily into an empty salt barrel, which he inverted and rolled beside Cupe, after which act he quickly lifted me to a seat on its head. A pile of bundled garments, blankets, canteens, belts and other accoutrements on an exposed shelf was hastily seized in willing hands and stuffed as unceremoniously into the empty nail-keg seats from which each man arose. Quickly all the contraband articles were concealed and the kegs again inverted. Every man now sat silent in his accustomed place. Only the old negro had been deliberate; it was he who deftly concealed a contribution from our Stringtown girls, a package that contained a satin banner stitched by loving fingers. White groundwork in one corner of that folded flag was starred in blue and the banner was embellished with three broad stripes, a white one bounded by two red bars. The emblem had previously been wrapped in rubber cloth, and Cupe thrust it carefully into a capacious pocket. As the grocer handed the flag to the negro he remarked: "The Yankees 'll not sarch a nigger."

In a few moments the door opened, and the Red-Head

Boy of Nordman entered. He shot quick glances about the room, then, as unconcerned as the other occupants seemed to be, stepped to the counter, asked the grocer for five cents' worth of raisins, making a face as he did so at me as I sat on the barrel, and I viciously mouthed back again. Then there came the sound of rattling scabbards, the clash of metal against metal, the door opened and a man entered dressed in blue. He was an officer, and glanced searchingly around until his gaze lighted on the Red-Headed Boy, who seemed to stare indifferently back at him, exactly as did every other member of the circle.

"Evening, friends," said the soldier, "a cool night this."

"Rather fresh," replied the grocer.

"How far is it to Nordman's pond?"

"'Bout half a mile." Then, pointing to the boy, the grocer added, "This boy lives with Mr. Nordman."

The cavalryman's quick eye surveyed the room again; his scrutiny was directed successively from face to face; he turned his attention again to the grocer, who, seemingly oblivious to the inquisition, stood with folded arms.

"Come on, sonny," the soldier said, addressing the boy, "show me the way to Nordman's pond; we camp there to-night. Good-night, friends."

The boy followed him, but as he passed old Cupe, the negro leaned over, and putting his rubber lips close to the suspect's ear whispered: "Yo' bettah look out, yo' sly debbil, yo' am spinnin' de fre'ds ob yoah own shroud."

Another rattle of sabres and squeaking of leather, a word of command, a tramp of horses' feet, and in a few moments the circle of men within the room again sat in silence.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE LOVE SONG OF THE REBEL SOLDIER

STEPPING from his place behind the door, Cupe, evidently anxious to leave the room, addressed Mr. Wagner: "An' may de nigger ax, did yo' read dem papahs?"

"Yes;" said the clerk glancing at the judge.

"An' hab yo' nuffin t' say?"

Again the clerk glanced at the judge, and slowly drawled out, "Not now," emphasising the word "now."

"An' yo' may wait too long ef yo' doan look out," mumbled the negro.

Turning to Judge Elford, the slave asked: "An' hab yo' anyt'ing t' say t' Cupe, Ma'se Jedge?"

"No," said the judge, sharply, "not now;" and he, too, emphasised the word "now." But he did not glance at the clerk.

Bowing, the negro seemed inclined to ask another question, but instead stepped back to his place, for at that instant there came a second interruption from without. Sounds of muffled footsteps in the dust before the grocery, the gentle squeak of saddle leather, — just sufficient to indicate to ears familiar with the sound that mounted men were cautiously slipping from their horses, — and then whispering voices were heard. A face was now pressed against the glass panel in the door, and a pair of eyes gazed into the room. More than one hand

sought a side pocket; the grocer stepped quickly to the rear of the store, turned, and in the gloom stood facing the door, with a bright object thrown across his arm, — an object that glittered in the faint light.

"Hist!" he whispered; "ef et es a raid, we have work to do." And then a double tap or rap was struck upon the door, a rap that seemed to be understood by all, for the grocer dropped his gun and stepped back into the light, and each hand was withdrawn from the pocket that had so suddenly encased it. The door opened, and six Stringtown County men, two of whom were members of the village circle, came into the room. It was evident that this body of men was expected by some, if not all, of the members present, but the raid (for we knew full well the unconcern of the blue-coated soldier was assumed) had aroused suspicion. Even Cupe, as shown by his secreting the Confederate banner, was one of the initiated, and even he accepted that the blue-coated soldiers had slipped back, for I heard him mutter, "Damn dat Red-Head cuss!"

The nail kegs were suddenly inverted, their concealed contents were removed and parcelled out to respective owners. The coats of the intruders were thrown open and the new leather belts were hastily buckled around each waist. The grocer produced seven pistols from an unseen receptacle, one for each of the six-belted holsters, the seventh being laid upon the counter. A blanket roll was then taken by each man, who quickly stepped to his horse and strapped the roll to the back of the Mexican saddle, and then returned to the room; where, amid a series of hand-shakings, in which all joined, the booted and newly armed men prepared to make their last farewell to Stringtown friends. But the saddle on which I sat, still hidden in the inverted salt barrel, lacked an

owner, and one pistol and belt lay unclaimed on the counter. A whispered consultation was held by the adventurous volunteers, who were preparing for a perilous attempt to slip through the Federal lines into the South to join the Confederate forces. Evidently these men expected a companion who had failed to appear, and for whom they were restlessly waiting.

"Comrades, we may never meet around the old stove again; let us have a last song before we start," said one of them. "Let it be to our sweethearts, Captain."

"Oh, yes, I am a Southern girl, and glory in the name,
I boast of it with greater pride than glittering wealth and fame;
I envy not the Northern girl her robes of beauty rare,
Though diamonds deck her snowy neck and pearls bespread her hair.

"Huzza! huzza! for the Southern girl so fair,
Huzza! for the homespun dress the Southern ladies wear.

"Our homespun dress is plain, I know, our hats palmetto too,
But then this shows what Southern girls for Southern rights can do.
We send our sweethearts to the war, but, dear girls, never mind,
The Southern soldier 'll not forget the girl he left behind.

"Huzza! huzza! for the Southern girl so fair,
Huzza! for the homespun dress the Southern ladies wear."

When the song was ended, it was thought unwise to linger, but just as they were about to depart, the man they were expecting entered. The new-comer was Mose the Jew. His face was wreathed in smiles, those eternal smiles, and a familiar chuckle he was wont to make when pleased greeted the assembly as he lifted the saddle and carried it from the room. Returning, he proceeded to belt and arm himself as the others had done. "The flag — the flag," said the club-footed cavalier,

"we must not forget the flag." Old Cupe stepped forward — not to the man who spoke, but to Mose, to whom he handed the rubber-bound parcel. Then he turned and addressed the leader: "Bettah yo' go out de Mt. Carmel pike an' cut 'roun' de county co'ht-house an' git back ter de Stringtown pike by de souf road. Steer cl'ar ob de pond ob Ma'se Nordman."

"Yes," interrupted another, "a squad of Union cavalry is camping in the pond-field."

"We know it," was the reply; "Mose followed them beyond the Campbellite Church and has just returned."

In single file they left the room, Mose bringing up the rear, to my amazement accompanied by my chum, the grocer's boy, who as he passed handed me the key to his box of papers. "Take them," said he, "take them home with you, Sammy, pictures, short-hand notes, all; if I get back from the war, I 'll want them, if not — " He faltered, tears sprang to his eyes, he held out his hand, which I grasped. Then he turned and ran from the room. The occupants of the circle crowded close upon the retreating forms, and soon the storeroom was deserted. The squad of rebels unhitched their horses, quietly mounted them — the grocer's boy springing up behind the Jew — and then they turned toward the South. Without another word this group of resolute men and the chum of my childhood, whom I never saw again, started in a brisk trot up the Stringtown pike. And I recall now that after the sound of the horses' hoofs died away in the distance, we who lingered outside the grocery caught the strain of a song from afar that seemed almost like an echo. The musical voice of the rebel captain came floating to our ears, bearing a couplet of the ode he had sung in praise of the Southern girl, the verse in which occurred the lines: —

"We send our sweethearts to the war, but, dear girls, never mind,
The Southern soldier 'll not forget the girl he left behind."

But the love song soon died away, as did the tramp of the horses. The bareheaded watchers stood a moment in the night air, then re-entered the grocery, the broken circle formed again, and each man sat silent, gazing at the stove.

Then occurred a curious thing. The Red-Headed Boy of Nordman had returned, and, unperceived by me at least, had entered the room with the others, but apparently without an object, and, after glancing about, he quietly started out again. As he passed, Cupe, reaching down from his station near the door, caught him by the ear and held him fast, whispering a few words as he did so.

Turning to those about the stove, the negro asked Judge Elford, "An' hab yo' nuffin fo' suah t' say t' Cupe?"

"No."

"De signs am fulfillin' demsel's monstrous fas'," the negro mumbled. "Yo' won't fergit t' count de money in de desk an' read de papahs befo' de Co'ht, of yocasion 'quires?"

"I have promised to do so," replied the judge.

Turning to Mr. Wagner, Cupe asked, "An' did yo' read de writin' I lef' yo' las' night?"

"I did."

"An' caint yo' say nuffin t' Cupe?"

"Not now, Cupid."

With a troubled look, old Cupe, leading the Red Headed Boy by the ear, left the grocery and passed out into the starlight.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"DINAH, CUPE MUS' LEAVE DE CABIN"

THE time consumed by Cupe and his prisoner in reaching the cabin was not sufficient to permit them to leisurely walk that distance. They must have run part of the way, for in a very short time the cabin door was thrown open, and holding the boy firmly the negro entered the room. "Brung me de fox trap an' chain, an' de chicken-house lock, an' a strap, de debbil am t' pay."

Dinah obeyed; Cupe's voice evinced his suppressed excitement. Forcing the captive into a rustic chair, they bound him securely; a long strap was wrapped about both the chair and the body of the boy, and locked by a padlock to two staples that for some other purpose had been previously driven into a log behind him. Thus the boy sat with his back against the wall; his arms were strapped tightly to his side, but his head, forearms and hands were free. Cupe drew the table close to his bound victim's knees; the boy's hands could easily move about its surface. A large pan of water containing a dipper was placed on the table, a liberal supply of provisions was thrust alongside it, and after this had been done Cupe said: "Yo' am likely t' want fo' comp'ny befo' long, yo' East Kaintuck scrub, an' yo' may git hungry befo' de comp'ny calls. Dah am grub t' eat an' watah t' drink, an' while yo' wait, yo' kin tell yoah story t' yoah ma'se, de debbil." The boy's eyes gleamed with hatred, but he made no reply.

Then the negro turned to Dinah. For once his method of addressing her exhibited less of the ruler and more of the companion. The affection that had ever been a part of his true self, but which was generally masked by gruffness, now crept to the surface. He took her hand, led her to the fireplace and seated her in a low corn-shuck chair on one side of the hearth, himself taking a similar chair opposite.

"Honey," he said slowly and tenderly, "de min' ob yoah husban' am runnin' back t'-night — back t' de days ob de long ago. Dah hab be'n joy an' sorrah fo' de heaht, wa'm an' cole fo' de flesh, Dinah, 'twixt de night yo' lef' yoah home on Grassy Creek an' now. Min' yo' de ole time, Dinah — min' yo' de time when Cupe came ridin' dat fust Satuhday night t' de cabin doah?"

"I min' de time, Cupe."

"Yo' wah a beauty ob a wench, Dinah, yo' wah de flowah ob de lan'. An' well do Cupe min' dat night, too. Befo' he staht fo' de trip dat Satuhday ahftahnoon he stan' befo' ole ma'se an' say: 'Dah am a monstrous pritty gearl on Grassy Creek.' An' ole ma'se say: 'De fa'dah away de bettah; et am well she am no closah dan Grassy Creek.' An' Cupe ax may he borrah ole Prince? an' ma'se cuss an' damn de wench on Grassy Creek, but Cupe doan say nuffin; an' when ma'se stop Cupe jes stan' still, fo' while de ma'se cuss an' sw'ar' he doan say de word *no*.

"'What fo' yo' stan'n' dah fo'?' ax ma'se.

"'Fo' de loan ob ole Prince t' ride t' Grassy Creek.'

"'Yo' kin go,' say ma'se, 'but min' yo' am back by foah o'clock Monday mahn'n.' An' es Cupe staht t' t'ank him fo' de kindness, ma'se say: 'Shet yoah mouf.' An' den Cupe ax: 'What 'bout de *pat-a-role*?'

"An' ma'se, he take a papah out ob his pocket an' write de pass, an' say: 'De pat-a-role 'll gib yoah brack back a wa'min' ef yo' ain't home by foah o'clock Monday mahn'n.'

"Min' yo', Dinah, dat Satuhday night?"

Dinah bowed her head.

"An' min' yo' how supple Cupe wah den, Dinah?"

Again she nodded.

"Yoah cabin wah down in de hollah jes back ob yoah ma'se's house, Dinah, an' es Cupe ride up t' de doah yo' step t' de sill — et wah a monstrous good sign, Dinah. Yo' wah stan'n' in de yard befo' de doah, an' Cupe pull up de ho'se an' look down an' say a sof' word, an' yo' smile up in his face. An' Cupe jes git down an' stick de switch he hole in his han' in de sof' earf keerless like — a fool nigger who am in lub ain't got no sense — an' he take de bag ob cohn off Prince an' stan' et 'side yoah doah an' lead Prince t' de stable.

"Min' yo' dat bag ob cohn, Dinah?"

A tear ran down the cheek of the old woman.

"Dah wah a bluebird on a pole in front ob yoah cabin, an' a lady bluebird sat in de little doah befo' de nes'. Jes den de man bird wid de bright, blue coat an' red breast come from out de air an' light by her side; an' Cupe pint t' de cooin' birds an' say: 'Dat sign am good.' An' yo' make no ansah, but take Cupe by de han' an' lead him into de cabin, an' he sit on one side ob de harf, an' yo' sit on de uddah. But we two niggers hab no need fo' fiah dat night, Dinah.

"And when de niggers see dat bag ob cohn stan'n' by yoah doah, Dinah, dey pass de word 'roun'; dah wah n't no buck nigger boddah yo' ag'in. Eb'ry Satuhday night, when Cupe ax fo' de pat-a-role pass, ole ma'se growl, an' den he write Cupe de pass, an' at las' dah wah a wed'n'.

"Min' yo' de weepin' willah befo' de doah? Et wah de bad sign ob yoah life, Dinah, an' Cupe wah de cause. De switch he stick in de groun' wah a twig ob weepin' willah. De nex' time he call on yo' de buds had broken; de nex' time de lebes had sprouted; de weepin' willah-tree wah planted by de han' ob Cupe, an' de trouble et brought wah befo' yoah doah, Dinah, an' settlin' obah yoah cabin. Cupe could n't say nuffin, but he know de ebil spell wah on; dah am no way t' change dat awful willah-tree sign. Et runs fo' fifty yeah, Dinah. An' when de fust chile come t' smile on us, de pure little blos'm widout any tech ob white — eben de sole ob de feet wah not white — yo' wah so happy, Dinah, an' proud ob de pure nigger blood in ets brack cheek. Den Cupe slip out an' stan' by dat willah slip an' pray t' all de gods fo' de sign t' change. But et wah no use, Dinah; de little blos'm grew big 'nuff t' creep t' de harf, an' den et close ets eyes an' pass away."

Dinah sat silent, tear after tear rolling down her cheek.

"An' 'nuddah chile come, an' grow up t' set in de doah, but de shaddah ob de willah fall an' rubs ets life out. Foah blos'ms what come t' us on Grassy Creek wah blighted by dat ebil willah-tree shaddah; dah am foah grabes 'bout es long es an ax handle, side by side, in de ole Grassy Creek grabeyard."

Dinah rocked back and forth, sighing and moaning.

"An' den Cupe beg ole ma'se t' buy yo', Dinah, an' brung yo' home, an' ma'se say yo' wah a comely nigger, an' Grassy Creek wah too far fo' Cupe t' ride ebr'y Satuhday ebenin', an' he buy yo' fo' twelve hund'd dollahs an' build de cabin fo' yoah nes'. But et wah n't no use, de ebil sign go on.

"Min' yo' de night las' week when Cupe wah gone from sundown till mahn'n?"

"Yes."

"Dinah, he slip back t' de ole cabin. Dah dat debbilish ole tree stan', ets limbs wavin' in de night air. Cupe step t' its side an' cuss et in de moonlight. De long fingahs move in de wind an' rub on de head ob de nigger, but Cupe had swo' by de chillun what am gone t' kill dat tree when de fifty yeah had passed, an' et wah fifty yeah when de sugah watah run las' spring. An' he took his ax an' chop es nebbah he chopped befo'. De chips fly like lebes in wintah, an' de ole tree tuhn t' one side an' fall bump on de groun'. Den Cupe scattah salt on ets stump an' put his foot on de ole debbil's back an' cuss de hoodoo tree."

Dinah chuckled.

"Dah hab be'n thirteen blos'ms t' cheer yo', Dinah, sense dat switch wah sprouted, an' eb'ry chile es brack es Cupe. Yo' hain't had no shame t' bury, Dinah."

Cupe pointed to the hearthstone between them.

"Dinah," he asked, "min' yo' de fac' dat nebbah hab two chillun sat side by side on de great stone? An' now yoah head am white, yoah face am wrinkled, yoah han' am skinny an' yoah toof am yallah. Dah am thirteen little grabes — foah on Grassy Creek an' nine b'hin' dis cabin. Et am a hoodoo numbah, but now de ebil spell am obah. De willah-tree am dead. De missus an' all de ole fren's am sleepin' quiet; de wicked ole ma'se am walkin' — he only am movin' ob all de fo'ks yo' knew when yoah cheek wah plump, yoah toof white an' yoah skin shiny."

Dinah was sobbing softly, and Cupe fell upon his knees on the spot upon the hearth to which he had pointed, and took her hands between his rough palms, lovingly stroking the bony fingers.

"Dinah, t'-night Cupe mus' lebe de ole cabin. De

signs am all fulfilled, de fifty yeah ob pain am passed, an' we two niggers am free from de willah-tree spell. De Susie chile only am lef' t' pint back t' de sacred promise, an' t' sabe dat chile, an' lib up t' de promise we made de young ma'se, Cupe mus' lebe de ole home."

He took from his tattered pocketbook a paper that, although he could not read, he evidently fully comprehended, and held it out to his wife: "Yo' may stay in de cabin, Dinah, ef yo' wants t' stay, an' when de mahn'n comes ef yo 'll take dis papah t' Ma'se Elford, yo 'll git yoah freedom an' kin go back t' yoah ole home on Grassy Creek, de cabin wah' yo' stood in de doah when Cupe ride up fifty yeah ago."

"An' ef I doan take de papah?"

"Pack yoah duds an' bid farewell t' de lan' ob yoah birf, fo' when t'-morrah sun rise Cupe an' Susie 'll be down in de Licking Hills wid dere faces tu'ned to'ard de cole Canerdy lan'."

Again he held out the paper. "Dinah, will yo' go back t' de ole cabin on Grassy Creek, er will yo' walk into de night wid Cupe?"

The woman pushed back the paper and repeated the vow made twice before: "De Canerdy lan' am cole an' de grabes ob de missus an' de chillun am deah, in ole Kaintuck, but fo' de good ob de Susie chile an' de lub ob ole Cupe, Dinah 'll close de cabin doah ferebah."

CHAPTER XXXVII

RED-HEAD, CAPTIVE

IT was needless for them to consult concerning the next step. Their conversation had often been of such a nature as to prepare both for the course they must pursue in case it became desirable to "run away." Rapidly they moved about the rough room, selecting the various articles of clothing or the utensils that might prove of use in their wanderings. They recognised that little could be carried, and consequently few household articles aside from the provisions were disturbed. The only exception to this exacting rule proved to be the garments of Susie, for these were all neatly packed by Dinah in an oilcloth sack, the mouth of which was closed with a draw-string.

The captive boy sat silent, closely watching the busy pair, who, upon the contrary, seemed to give him no attention. In a short time the hasty preparation was made, the slaves were ready to start for Canada, one with a basket, the other with a bag. Then Cupe turned to the boy, and standing before him said abruptly:

"Yo' am a debbil from the mount'ns, yo' Red-Head cuss, an' hab no place 'mong civil fo'k. Why doan yo' go back t' yoah pap?"

"Can't, yo' old nigger," the boy answered insolently

"Wha' am yoah pap?"

"Dead."

"Yo' bettah go back t' yoah ma when yo' git loose."

"Dead."

The negro's heart gave signs of relenting. In a more kindly voice he said:

"Hab yo' no bruddahs?"

"One."

"Yo' bettah go t' yoah bruddah."

The boy shook his head.

"Am dah a reason why yo' doan go?"

"Yes."

"What am de cause?"

"Dead."

The old man started unconsciously; then he lowered his voice:

"An' hab yo' no sisterin, chile?"

"Yes."

"How many sisterin?"

"One."

"Caint yo' go an' lib wid de gearl?"

Tears moistened the eyes of the captive boy; he shook his head.

"Ef Cupe 'll unlock de chain an' open de doah will yo' go back t' de mount'n gearl?"

Again the boy shook his head.

"Tole us de reason, chile;" and automatically the slave arranged the provisions on the table more conveniently. "Tole us de reason, chile."

"Dead."

The man stood a moment in silence.

"An' hab yo' no uddah kin but Ma'se Nordman?"

"No other."

"Et am a shame, et am a sin an' a shame."

"What?"

"Dat yo' hab come t' Stringtown. But yo' caint help

et, yo' am mixed in de sign ;" then, suddenly, with the word "sign" the negro changed his manner of expression. That word brought back to his mind the fact that the boy was destined to work evil according to the "sign." The superstitious old man forgot the former softened voice; no touch of pity was left in his heart; his tone grew harsh again: "Yo' cub ob Satin, an' et wah good fo' de libin' an' no hahm t' de dead ef yo' wah dead too;" and he turned away.

A vicious look came over the boy's face, he clenched his hand, and tried to shake his fist at the speaker. Neither spoke again. Susie, ready dressed — for the child had not been disrobed that night — was taken from her bed, wrapped in a woollen shawl, and, still asleep, was gently clasped in the arms of the man; her head rested on one shoulder, while the bag of clothing depended by a strap from the other.

Dinah, bearing the provisions, as if determined to make good her thrice-told promise, opened the cabin door, stepped outside, and stood ready to close it. But just then Cupe, who, too, had reached the door, cried, "Come back, Dinah; dah am a fren' t' go wid us, an' a fren' t' say good-bye."

He laid the sleeping child on the bed, and stepping to the hearth, raised one of the flat stones, taking from beneath it three large kidney-shaped beans, each at least an inch in diameter. These he put into his pocket, addressing them as he did so: —

"Ef de time ebah comes t' act, yo' kin do yoah work; but yoah mouf hab be'n long shet sense yo' grew in de hot Guinee lan'. An' now fo' de las' word from de oldest fren' ob all."

He took his fiddle from the peg and raised it to his shoulder; his eyes closed, his chin dropped until it

touched the instrument, and then his expert fingers touched the strings.

Plaintive was the melody wafted into the air as the unlettered musician drew the bow. From his warm heart came the pathetic touch that vibrated the strings until they fairly spoke. He played only one air: —

"We'll hunt no moah fo' de 'possum an' de coon,
On de meddah, de hill, an' de shoah.
We 'll sing no moah by de glimmah ob de moon,
On de bench by de ole cabin doah.

"De days go by like de shaddah on de heaht,
Wid sorrah wha' all wah so bright,
De time am come when de darkeys hab t' part,
Den my ole Kentucky home, good-night."

When the last note died away, the child was taken up again, and at last the door closed behind the fugitives.

But now Dinah stopped. She lingered with bowed head before the home she had deserted. Tears coursed down her wrinkled cheeks, while Cupe, equally affected, but too stoical to exhibit his emotion, stood by her side. The old woman raised her hand and, pointing to the door, her finger nearly touching it, huskily asked:

"Min' yo' de sign ob deff, Cupe?"

"What sign ob deff? Dah am many signs ob deff?"

"De Bloody Hollah sign. Doan yo' see et am come true? *De Red-Head Boy am all alone in de cabin, he am sittin' in de cheer ob Susie.*"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RETURN OF THE REFUGEES

IN the autumn of 1868, several years later, two negroes accompanied by a girl about eight years of age, passed down the west side of Vine Street, Cincinnati.

They approached the Ohio River bank, and then stood gazing intently on the Kentucky shore. Not a word had been spoken since they first caught sight of the opposite bank of the river. Their quaint attire and strange bearing led a party of impudent wharf children to collect about them. Neither of the negroes who gazed so intently across the river noticed the group of urchins that was rapidly increasing in number, but the child, withdrawing her gaze from other objects, turned her eyes first at one and then at another of the encircling party, who insolently stared back again. At this point the carpet-bag in the hand of the old man was loosened; it fell upon the bouldered street and rolled upon its side, resting partly on his large feet. But he did not seem to feel its weight. Raising his arm, he pointed to the green Kentucky hills in the distance, but did not speak. A tear rolled down the cheek of his companion, the old woman, for it needed but this action to cause her to give way to suppressed emotion. She, too, dropped her satchel and clasped her hands, extending them toward the hills that rose beyond the city. A howl of derision now came from the throats of the circle of children, and a mischievous boy suddenly jumped forward and grabbed

the fallen sack. The girl snatched her hands from the grasp of the negroes, sprang upon the bent form of the rude meddler, threw her wiry arms about his neck, and, with a display of unexpected strength, threw him to the ground. The incident broke the reverie of the negroes, who, moving with greater suppleness than seemed possible to persons so aged, resumed possession of both the girl and the bag and retraced their steps to Second Street, turned to the right, and sought the entrance to the great new suspension bridge.

An hour afterward they slowly passed along Lexington Pike in the outskirts of Covington, and subsequently tramped up the long two-and-a-half-mile hill beyond the city limits. They were very tired, and frequently stopped to rest on the grassy roadside, when the child would bury her head in the lap of the negress, and that she closed her eyes in sleep was evident from the effort it required to arouse her. At last the party passed over the crest of the hill where stood the toll-gate, and then they moved down into the evening shadows that now closed rapidly about the winding road, which soon sank into a ravine, and then crept deeper still in order to descend by easy grade into the valley that must soon be crossed. To the left, one behind the other, on the slope of the opposite hill, could be seen ridges of earth that even in the shadows were yellow. Behind these stretched trenches deep enough to shelter armed men; once they were rifle-pits, and in 1862 commanded the pike; they overlooked it in 1868, and, nearly obliterated by time, they border it now. But unless the eight graves dug in 1862 near the crest of that hill are yet inviolate, no soldier, Blue or Grey, holds these silent redoubts. On beyond the trenches into deeper shadows plodded the three wanderers; the road curves, the rifle-pits and the dark

ravine are now in the rear. Looming high on the hill to the right appears at this point old Fort Mitchell, as silent as are the abandoned yellow trenches ironically standing guard over the peaceful valley. But the abandoned fort disappears too behind the wearied travellers, who now pass into the broad valley, still treading the pike. Thickets on either side spring from stumps where, in order to give free range for cannon and musket, all the trees were felled in 1862. But the war is over. A flock of sheep is resting where once stood a battery of brass field-guns. Fences burned for campfires have been replaced by new ones; no scattered cracker boxes, no broken army wagons, no limping mules, no mark of tent or of camp litter remain in the grassy fields bordering the road where a few years previously tens of thousands of armed men had bivouacked. Gone are all these, — the glittering guns, the caissons and cannon, the army, and the tramping sentry.

The travellers moved more slowly, the white pike turned grey in the deepening twilight, the grass-grown fields changed to black, and the foliage beside the pike lost its colour. Dusk turned to night. From a pond across the valley came the criës of frogs, some deep and guttural, others shrill, and yet others, unlike either croak or chirp, appeared to sound in harmony with the complaint uttered by the sombre rain-crow. From a clump of bushes nearby a rabbit leaped into the dust of the pike. The man dropped his sack, grasped the arm of the woman tremblingly, and the human figures stood gazing at the tiny form at their feet. The wondering rabbit stayed but a moment, then swiftly sped across the road, and disappeared in the weeds.

Without a word, the pilgrims turned and retraced their steps, dragging their coarse shoes wearily in the deep

"*WHERE once stood a battery of brass field guns*"

dust of the pike back to the silent fort that could no longer be seen in the darkness. As they entered the shades of the gloomy hollow the cry of a hoot-owl broke upon the air; coming from a shrub within the solitary fort, now on their left; then, from a dead beech-tree that rises above the graves of the soldiers behind the rifle-pits on the crest of the other hill, sounded the answering cry of the old owl's mate. The woman touched the man on his left shoulder, and he turned to catch sight of the tiny crescent moon shining through the limbs of a dead shrub. Again the old woman touched his shoulder, his left shoulder, and pointed to the brush-screened new moon.

That night the travellers rested with a negro friend who lived in Rat Row, and the next morning turned their footsteps down the Ohio River. They tramped along the shore by easy journey, stopping often to rest, never at a loss for lodging places, until they reached a point opposite Carrollton, where they called the ferryman and crossed the river. From this point they struck back into Kentucky, following the road that parallels the beautiful and picturesque Kentucky River until Carrollton was left far in the rear. Then they struck into the hills and moved in the direction of Stringtown. "Et wah a long way 'roun'," said Cupe, "but de rabbet knows ets bisness. De longes' way 'roun' am de safes' way home ef de rabbet cross de paff."

CHAPTER XXXIX

CUPE'S PLEA FOR SUSIE'S NAME

ON a knoll back from the road stood a colonial mansion, an hour's ride from Stringtown. Before it stretched a woodland pasture that gently sloped from the house. Great sugar-maple and venerable walnut trees shaded this spacious lawn, which was artistically ornamented by clumps of yucca and groups of cedar, pine, and juniper trees. A picturesque drive led from the door of the mansion, down the slopes, through the grounds to the front gate. A dense osage orange hedge bordered the opposite side of the road.

In an easy-chair on the porch of the house sat a grey-haired man; a party of merry, young people was preparing to enter a large carryall that stood on the drive before the porch. Two of the pleasure seekers — young girls — kissed the man and said: "Farewell until morning, papa!" Then the party drove down the avenue on to the public road and disappeared from sight. The man on the porch in the shade of the trees leaned back in his easy-chair and watched the sun go down; gently rocking, he puffed a cigar, the curling smoke of which could be seen by one with good eyes from the distant hedge bordering the street and extending opposite the mouth of the avenue that led to the house. Three faces, two of them black, the other white, peered through the hedge commanding a full view of the solitary figure on the porch. Twilight deepened, and from the log

cabins behind the house came another vehicle, a spring wagon, laden with negroes dressed in gay-coloured, holiday attire. The three figures drew back at their approach and concealed themselves behind the thick part of the hedge.

The wagon passed down the avenue, turned out into the road and disappeared in the direction of Stringtown. The man on the porch, the sole occupant of the deserted house, unconscious of their watchful eyes, puffed his cigar.

Evening drew near; the dew and the shadows of night fell together. The man threw the stump of his cigar into the lawn, entered the house, lighted a lamp and without drawing the curtain seated himself at a table and began to read an historical record of Kentucky. Thus he sat alone until deep darkness brooded over all things without the house.

Unrest tormented him. Dropping the book and lighting a cigar, the uneasy watcher threw his feet upon the arm of a tall chair, dropped his head upon the back of the rocker, faced the window and gently puffed his cigar. With lips pursed together, he threw a thread of white smoke into the room and dreamily gazed upon it with half-closed eyes. The deep blue that curled upward from the tip of his cigar contrasted sharply with this vapour-mixed cloud. The circle of smoke sped to the ceiling and shattered itself against a projecting decoration. Another ring, moving like creeping cotton, followed the first; trembling, weaving, seemingly undecided as to whether it should move up or down, the phantom balanced itself in the air, then collapsed and disappeared. A third followed the second; softer, whiter, more perfect than the others, it moved upward more gracefully. The thin thread of blue from the tip

of the cigar between the forefinger and thumb of the nicotine dreamer followed this retreating circle; it thrust itself into the centre of the vortex ring, then lapped over it, and before the combination burst spread as a revolving sheath from above its upper edge.

Into the stillness and the silence passed another fairy ring; a feather's touch would have crushed it, an upstarting puff of air would have been fatal. Slowly this fifth wreath moved upward; drawing the blue thread from the cigar's tip into its depths, it balanced itself exactly in the torpid air, and then, just before collapsing, the man who faced it saw from the inner circle, where blue and white mingled, a pair of eyes, blue eyes, spring into existence and gaze down into his own.

The hand that held the cigar dropped, but the man was unconscious of the movement; his mind turned from the picture above to a scene of other years, when a pair of living eyes, eyes exactly like these, gazed beseechingly into his own. These phantom orbs from out the burst fairy wreath had reflected a glimpse of other days. Then his glance dropped to the night-black window; there, set in a face of darkness quite different from the blackness about it, hung two white eyes that gazed in upon him who dreamed as waking men sometimes dream. The startled watcher turned back to the sun-white wreath above; it had vanished. He dropped his glance to the black face in the window; the eyes were gone. Not a word did he utter, but grasping the decanter by his side, turned it up and drank deeply of the amber liquid; then, as if to test the correctness of his senses or to face the spell that bound him, threw his head back, gazed intently upward, puffed at the cigar, and a wreath softer than a cobweb and as white as snow sprang into existence. Floating in space as only vortex

rings can float, enlarging, drawing from above and below, from without and within, growing larger and softer and purer as it expanded, this thing of beauty, alive to the sight, but dead to the touch, expanded to the size of a child's face; then from out its depths a portrait from the past sprang again into life, a child's face, a baby face with great, beseeching eyes. Startled as he had never been before, the man shrank, dropped his cigar upon the carpet, and his gaze fell again to the window; there, close against the glass, gazing in upon him intently, as had the wreath-face from above, peered beseeching eyes like those he had just seen. That same face looked upon him from out the night; brightened by the lamplight, set in the frame of blackness, this imploring face was older, sadder, yet identical with that mind picture framed by the fairy wreath.

Springing from his place, the man threw the door wide open; for a time the darkness blinded him, and even when he pierced the depths nothing was to be seen but the streaming light that from the window marked its way across the drive and into the clump of trees beyond.

He slammed the door, turned the key, sprang to the window and pulled down the Venetian blind. The slatted shade fell to its place almost with the turn of the key, so rapidly did he move, but simultaneously with its rustle a heavy knock sounded on the door, a knock that made the silent house echo. Notwithstanding the experiences through which he had just passed, without any hesitation whatever the man turned the key and again threw open the door. A flood of light streamed across the porch, showing three figures, one a child that stood in front of the open way. They entered without invitation and the host blurted out angrily: "What the devil do you want?"

"An' hab yo' fo'got de ole man, Ma'se?"

"What! Cupe and Dinah."

"An' Susie, Ma'se, an' Susie."

"Who is Susie?"

"Doan yo' know de chile?"

"No; an' I don't care to know her. When did you get back, Cupe?"

"Look at de honey gearl," said the negro, ignoring the question. "Look at de chile ag'in, Ma'se."

Something in the tone of the old negro startled the owner of the house. He put his finger under the chin of the child, turned her face up to the light and gazed down into her wondering eyes. The eyes in the smoke wreath were on him again, the face in the window was now a face in the room. A twinge of pain that did not escape the quick eye of Cupe passed over his countenance; memory served the man truly, and in a flash he saw a child in the arms of a beseeching woman. And he remembered, too, that together mother and child had passed out into the night, out of his sight, out of his life.

"No, Cupe, I do not know her," he said, and turned to the negro. "Now answer my question. When did you get back?"

Again the negro drew the attention of the man to the girl. "Doan yo' 'lect de muddah ob de chile?"

"No; and I care nothing for either the child or its mother. What brings you here to-night?"

Glancing about the room, the negro caught sight of a hand-mirror, left on the table by one of the young ladies. Picking it up, he handed it to the man. "Look into de glass, Ma'se; see de eyes dat look back in yoah face an' den look at de eyes ob de chile."

A flush spread over Mr. Manley's face; he raised his

clenched fist, but the negro making no motion to evade the blow, said in a low, respectful tone:

"'Deed, Ma'se, Cupe doan mean no disrespec'. Look at de eyes ob de chile, an' look in de glass an' den look at de face ob de chile an' t'ink ob de woman yo' lubbed in York State, an' who follud yo' back t' Kaintuck. She tramped out into de night, a lone woman, wid yoah chile in her arms, from dis same room."

The hand of the man trembled; he dropped the glass and sank into a chair. The negro closed the door and locked it, gazing constantly at the man, who for a moment made no effort to renew the conversation. "Ole Sukey," continued Cupe, "who buy her freedom, saw yo' in Sah'toga wid de muddah ob de chile. She wah bright an' pritty, an' de smile wah on her face."

Manley's anger blazed out. "Cupe Hardman, when morning comes your back will answer for this night's work. Out of my house, you impudent vagabonds. Back to Canada, back with that brat, or by God I 'll —"

The negro sank upon his knees and held up his hands. "Cupe an' Dinah raised yo', Ma'se, on de ole Hardman fa'm. Dey lub yo' now es ef yo' wah dah own chile. Min' yo' not de story ob yoah life? Lis'n t' Cupe befo' yo' dribe dis little chile 'way. Yoah mudder an' yoah pap once libbed in Stringtown; dey wah poo' people, Ma'se, an' yo' wah a wee babe. Den de sickness came to yoah house an' den deff. Bof yoah muddah an' yoah pap wah carried t' de grabeyard. An' den ole ma'se say: 'Dinah, kin yo' raise de orfin Stringtown chile?' an' Dinah say: 'Es easy t' raise two chillun es one.' An' ma'se brung yo' home nex' day, a little boy wid great eyes — no uddah chile but yoah own kin hab sech eyes —" and Cupe glanced at Susie. "An' yo' grew up 'long wid de chile I lub so well, de boy whose mud-

dah die long 'go. But dah wah no use tryin', yo' two boys wah cross-grained an' tough, yo' fight an' bite an' raise de debbil, an' at las' sep'rate — yo' know why. De fa'm wah not big nuff fo' bof ob yo'. Ef ebah yo' had stepped foot on de ole place ahftah de las' act yo' did, Ma'se Hardman 'ud hab killed yo' suah. But he keep his mouf to hisse'f fo' de honah ob de fam'ly. Ma'se Hardman gib yo' dis fa'm when yo' tuhn 'way ; de lan' wah rich an' yo' wah smaht ; et am a biggah fa'm now. Yo' am a fine gem'n an' a rich man, Ma'se."

"Well, but why are you here, Cupe?" said Mr. Manley. "Why are you here to-night? Do you want help, money?"

The negro shook his head.

"What is it, Cupe?"

Pointing to the child, the black, still kneeling, said: "Look at de Susie chile, doan look at Cupe."

"I have never seen the girl before, Cupe; I swear by the Lord —"

Cupe held up his hand: "Doan sw'ar' et out, Ma'se." Then he added: "She hab no muddah."

"Well."

"She needs a faddah."

The man raised his fist, but Cupe again held out his defenceless hand. "She needs de *name*."

"What damned scheme is this? Nigger Cupe, by God I'll stretch your neck on the old elm in the back pasture sure as Heaven lets me live till morning. Out, out of the room! When daylight comes the hounds will be on your track."

No movement was made by the kneeling negro; with upstretched hands, uncovered head, he looked beseechingly upward. Down the cheeks of his wrinkled face a tear trickled.

"You shall be thrashed until your back is bloody as sure as the Lord — "

He was again interrupted by the kneeling black, who held up his hand, the palm exposed. "See yo' de scar in de han' ob Cupe?"

"What is that to me?"

"Dah am no feah fo' de flesh in de heaht ob de man who b'lebes in de sign. Save de honah ob yoah own chile, Ma'se, an' den cut de back ob de nigger."

"I care nothing for your signs. Go!"

"Gib de Susie chile her name," pleaded the negro; "the yinnecent gearl hab asked, 'Am I *only* nigger Susie?' Lis'n, Ma'se Manley, please lis'n. In de cole Canerdy lan' Susie libed wid Cupe an' Dinah, who take her out ob Kaintuck. De yeahs come an' go, an' et wah cole near 'bout all de time. Cupe work in de day an' Dinah stay wid Susie, an' no ha'm come t' any ob dem — but et wah not like libin' in de ole cabin in Kaintuck. Cupe come home one night, an' Dinah say: 'Susie ax a quistion t'-day.' 'An' yo' ansah et, Dinah?' 'No.' 'What wah de quistion?' 'She say, "In de school I sit in de seat wid Mary Jones, an' in de uddah seat sit An'e Moo'e, an' in de nex' seat sit Lucy Smiff." "E'zac'ly." I ansah. 'An' den I tu'n de subject by sayin': "De teachah am a kind man ef he do weah a coa'se, woman-like dress an' a string ob beads." She say: "Yes; but he ax my name ag'in, an' I tole him, 'Susie.' 'Susie what?' 'Jes Susie.' An' den he say: 'Tole de fo'ks yo' lib wid t' sen' de uddah name t'-morrah, an' tole 'em I 'll call t' see 'em soon.' Am I *only* Susie, Aunt Dinah?" she ax, an' a tear come into her eye.'

"'Dinah,' say Cupe, 'Dinah, when de mahn'n comes back we 'll start t' ole Kaintuck, back fo' de name ob de

chile.' An' heah we am, Ma'se Manley. Dah am nuffin moah' t' say."

No reply was made by the man, but his anger seemed to have been somewhat soothed.

After an interval Cupe continued: "Dah wah bad signs on de way back an' dah hab be'n ebil omen sense de good ole lan' wah reached, but heah de chile am at las' in de home ob her pap. Look up, Susie."

The child raised her face, and gazed into that of the white man.

"She doan ax fo' money, she doan ax fo' lan', er dresses, er rings. She doan ax fo' nuffin money kin brung, er fo' what doan b'long t' her; de yinnecent chile ax fo' de name she am 'titled to an' ax et ob de big, rich man who tu'ned a lone baby out into de worl' outen a name. De debbil nebbah did nuffin wussah."

"You insulting scoundrel —"

"Cupe an' Dinah lub de gearl an' lub de lan' ob Kaintuck bettah dan all de worl' b'side. But fo' de good ob de chile, ef yo' 'll take her into de house an' open yoah heaht t' de yinnecent orfin, an' gib her de name she need an' yo' owe t' her, we two ole niggers 'll tu'n back to de cole Canerdy lan' an' nebbah look on her face ag'in. Please, Ma'se Manley, an' de Lawd 'll bress yo' in de day ob jubilee."

Mr. Manley pointed to the door.

"Fo' de lub ob yoah chile, yoah own chile, Ma'se?"

Still he pointed to the door. "Go!"

The old man arose. Dinah for the first time moved to the front; she stood to the right of Mr. Manley, Cupe to his left.

"Will yo' damn yoah own chile by stealin' her name 'way? Bettah steal her money er cut her froat."

Mr. Manley raised his clenched fist. "Dog of a

nigger, you lie, you lie!" The negroes sprang forward simultaneously. Cupe wrapped his long arms around Manley, holding him tightly. Dinah jerked forth a strong strap, and before the prisoner realised what they were about lashed his ankles together, while with another strap she bound his arms close to his side. The movements of the actors were unexpected, the strength displayed was unlooked for, the expertness with which they did their work amazing. The prisoner became a prisoner without realising the fact until he was bound, and then he instantly regained his natural calmness.

"You 'll be flogged in the morning until your back is raw, Cupe," he quietly said.

But Cupe before replying set the helpless man in his easy-chair, then said: "De lash am not so painful es de brand ob de fiah. Cupe kin stan' dem bof. Ma'se, de Lawd knows Cupe lubs yo' yit, but he lubs de Susie gearl moah. Yo' hab done wrong t' yo'selb, Ma'se, an' yo' hab done wrong t' Susie, yoah own chile."

"I have not, Cupe. The Lord knows —"

Cupe again interrupted him.

"Two times befo' yo' call on de Lawd. Do yo' wan' t' lebe de mattah ob de truff ob yoah words t' de Lawd?"

"The Lord witness that I have had no part in wronging that child."

"De Lawd mus' be de witness; yo' hab called de 'zact numbah ob times on de one who kin prube de right. De Lawd shall be de jedge." Then slowly, earnestly, as if uttering a sacred command, he said:

"Brung de o'deal bean, Dinah, brung bof de o'deal bean."

CHAPTER XL

THE FEARFUL AFRICAN ORDEAL TEST

SOMETHING in the tone of the old man startled the prisoner. A chill crept over him. Brought up as he had been with the negroes, he realised that unless the intruders had been reckless of personal danger or sure of the success of their undertaking they would not have been so rash as to commit such an outrage on a Kentucky gentleman. It might mean death to them.

For the first time in his life Mr. Manley felt the sensation of fear. Too well did he realise the extent to which a fanatical fatalist, such as he knew Cupe to be, would carry his measures, did he believe it a duty imposed by supernatural power.

"De bean, Dinah, gib me de bean."

Unbuttoning the bosom of her dress, the woman drew forth a leather bag. Cupe opened it by means of a draw-string and poured into his palm three kidney-shaped beans, each about half an inch in diameter and two inches long, which he held before the prisoner.

"Ma'se, ef Cupe had be'n bohn in de hot Afriky lan' he 'd hab be'n a king. Dis is de bean my gran'dad, King ob de Gol'coas' ob Afriky, brought t' America. Et wah raised on a sacred vine dat only kings might grow. No uddah man wah 'lowed t' touch de precious bean." He reverently raised one of the nuts between the tip of his forefinger and his thumb; "*Et am de sacred o'deal nut*," he said in an undertone.

"Et kin tole ef a man am lyin'. Ef a man am s'pected ob killin' anuddah man de o'deal nut kin prube de fac'. Ef a man am s'pected ob hoodoo work, de o'deal bean kin show ef he be a hoodoo man. De woman what act de witch kin fool de doctah an' her husban', but she kin not fool de o'deal bean. De o'deal bean am God's bean, an' only de son ob a king kin make de o'deal test. Cupe am de son ob a king." [1]

"God Almighty, Cupe," cried Manley, "you are carrying your superstition too far!"

"De Lawd am goin' t' prube ef yo' hab be'n tellin' de truff 'bout de Susie chile."

"That devilish bean has no power; it is senseless."

"De o'deal nut kin do no ha'm to de yinnecent, but et am suah deff t' de guilty man. Yo, need hab no feah ef yo' hab tole de truff, but de man who take de o'deal test had bettah say his prayers ef de lie am on his lips." He turned to the woman: "Make de drink, Dinah;" and Cupe handed her one of the beans.

[1] This is according to the custom of the natives at the mouth of the Calabar river, Africa. But instead of a painless death the suspected person (or rather, victim) always perished miserably, suffering most intensely. In this connection the following by W. F. Daniell, Esq. *On the Natives of Old Calabar*, in the Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal, Vol. 40, 1846, pp. 313–327 (p. 318), is of interest: "The Government of the Old Calabar towns is a monarchical despotism rather mild in its general character, although sometimes severe and absolute in its details. The King and chief inhabitants ordinarily constitute a court of justice, in which all country disputes are adjusted, and to which every prisoner suspected of capital offences is brought, to undergo examination and judgment. If found guilty, they are usually forced to swallow a deadly poison, made from the poisonous seeds of an aquatic leguminous plant, which rapidly destroys life. This poison is obtained by pounding the seeds and macerating them in water, which acquires a white milky colour." To the above it may be added that this "Ordeal Test" was applied also to persons who displeased the ruler and who consequently made this a means to an end.

Dinah had often been called to assist in the mansion during parties and celebrations given in other days. Straight to the kitchen she went, crushed the bean and pounded it into meal. Then she poured cold water over the powder, set the pan on the wood embers still glowing in the stove, stirred its contents slowly and watched the liquid until it simmered. During the period she mumbled strange words, made curious passes and motions with her hands, over the decoction, and once with her husky voice she sang a weird air such as no civilised musician ever cast into notes. At last the task was done. Cooling the decoction by holding the pan in cold water, she poured the potion into a tumbler, artfully decanting it from the dregs and carried the tea to Cupe, who sat facing the helpless man.

The little girl in the meantime had fallen asleep and rested on the sofa, but now her eyes were wide open.

"Ma'se Manley," said Cupe, taking the glass in his hand, "et es wid sorrah dat Cupe, who lubs yo' so deahly, feels de 'cessity ob honorin' yo' on dis yocasion. But yo' make him do et; free times an' one extra yo' call de Lawd t' witness de fac' yo' swo' to. De word ob a fine gem'n am great, but de powah ob de o'deal bean am greatah. Yo' may drink t' de glory ob de Lawd." He held the cup to the ashen lips of the man, who made no movement.

"Drink de o'deal tea, an' ef yo' hab tole de truff yoah res' 'll be sweet an' yoah wakin' pleasant."

"You black scoundrel!" answered the helpless man; "you fanatical lunatic! I won't swallow a drop."

"Yo' call' on de Lawd an' yo' mus' drink t' de Lawd. Et pains Cupe t' 'blige yo' t' op'n yoah lips, but he hab drenched ho'ses an' mules, an' kin drench a man. Drink, er Cupe 'll poah de sacred tea down yoah froat."

"Cupe, do you want to murder me? Dinah, when I was a child you held me on your knee, you have told me stories by the cabin fire, you have dressed me in the morning, watched over me during the day, and put me into bed at night. Dinah, am I not the orphan child you raised?"

"Cupe am de son ob a king."

"Dinah, I gave you money to buy tombstones for your children."

"De sacred o'deal comes from God, cussed be de pusson who bre'k de cha'm."

The man turned an imploring look on Cupe, who answered: "De o'deal bean am ha'mless t' de yinnecent."

"Don't poison me, Cupe; I ain't a dog. Shoot me. A man should not die by poison." The negro shook his head. The prisoner made one last appeal.

"My children, my two girls," continued Mr. Manley. "For their sakes."

"Dah am free gearls."

The man shook his head.

Cupe pointed to the sleeping child.

"No."

"God help yo' Ma'se. Down wid de o'deal."

There was no hope now; that *no* had steeled the negro's heart. By a method that must have been taught the mixer of the ordeal by one who was expert at forcing a liquid down the throat of a struggling person, Cupe and Dinah forced the prisoner to drain the strange potion to the dregs. Not a drop was spilled. Then Dinah went to the kitchen, washed the glass and pan, removed every evidence of disorder made by herself, and returned to find Cupe still facing the now very frightened man.

"Cupe," he said, "I feel strangely. There is a whirling in my brain; you have poisoned your old friend, Cupe."

"De o'deal am ha'mless t' de yinnecent."

"Cupe, I know nothing about the mother of the girl. I have never seen the girl before."

"De woman who carry de chile in her arms say dat yo' dribe her out into de night. She wrote et all down, an she swo' t' dat papah befo' de Stringtown jestice ob de peace."

"My daughters!" moaned the man, who now realised fully his position — poison in his blood, disgrace in the future. "Cupe, I beg you not to let that paper come to light — I beg you."

"Et hab be'n read by de Stringtown clerk."

The man's mind wandered; the deadly African ordeal was burning out his nerve power.

"Save me, Cupe, save the honour of my children," he implored. "In the drawer of that secretary you will find diamonds and pearls."

Cupe shook his head. Too well did he know the symptoms of that fearful ordeal, from which no man ever recovered. All who drank that potion were guilty.

"De jewels doan all b'long t' Susie."

"Take them all, but burn that paper. You mean to doubly murder me, Cupe?"

"De Lawd am yoah jedge, not Cupe."

The eyes of the man were now fixed on vacancy, his breath came spasmodically, his skin turned ashen white. "God help me. God save my children!"

No sign of sympathy was exhibited by the witnesses of the tragedy. Standing by his side, they coldly watched his spasmodic struggles until the life of the miserable man went out.

"Dinah," said Cupe, "de Lawd hab be'n de jedge. Bressed be de name ob de Lawd!"

In the grey of morning the merry frolickers returned. In the cheerful sitting-room Mr. Manley sat in his easy-chair, his head bowed on his folded arms that rested on the stand before him. In his hand, between the fore-finger and the thumb, was the ashened stump of a cigar. The lamp burned dimly, an open book lay face down on the table, beside it stood a decanter and a glass.

The doctor came. "Death was instantaneous. A painless touch at the heart, a drooping of the head; peaceable as an infant's sleep, came his last call."

The preacher came. "A good man has passed away, his name honoured throughout the land that knew him. His every act was that of righteousness; never did the poor or wronged appeal to him in vain. The soul of honour, his course on earth was a just one. Typical of sincerity, his every act is clear to the world, his record is open to the inspection of whomsoever will. Peaceably, as death should come to one who stands ever ready to die, did death come here. Touched by the kindly finger of God, this upright man went contentedly to his final home in the bright beyond."

CHAPTER XLI

THE STRINGTOWN SCHOOL

THE bell on the pole in front of the Stringtown schoolhouse had sounded the ending of the afternoon recess. Boys and girls together in struggling disorder crowded through the door into the room. In a few moments the noisy group had been distributed, and the majority at once became absorbed in the lessons that were to end the task of the day. Professor Drake had called the class in history to the recitation bench and had even asked a question of the head student, when the proceedings were interrupted by a knock.

Every head in the room was raised, each pair of eyes were fixed on the entrance. "Open the door, Sammy Drew," came the order from the teacher, and I sprang to do the honours of the occasion. Before me stood Mr. Nordman, the old gentleman who lived on the Stringtown pike, south of the village. With a nod he passed me by and in his genial manner reached out his hand to Professor Drake. But I did not close the door, neither did I move in nor out. Close behind him, and now facing me, stood a boy about my own age. Our eyes met; the devil could not have leered more wickedly than did he as his eye caught mine. His turned-up nose grew more pointed, his thin red lips drew tightly and stretched over his gums until I saw impressions of his teeth marked in white through their very substance. His hat was held in his hand — a hand as red

as the foot of a duck; his mop of red hair glistened in the sunshine like oak leaves after a frosty spell in autumn — red as are the leaves of the autumn oak, red as is no other shade of red.

Then occurred an amazing thing; while yet I faced the boy his impish eyes flashed and created sensations in my mind that words could not have done. "We two are enemies." Perhaps my own eyes answered his stare. Be this as it may, all the viciousness of my nature uprose, and back into his face I leered as insolently as did he into mine. His lips turned whiter still as he drew them more tightly over his closed teeth, and sure as truth can be written, his crimson ears wagged back and forth and mocked me. Then while yet they waved before my eyes, the scalp of his head began to creep backward; it drew upon the crown until his elongated forehead reached near to his ear tips, after which the flexible skin flipped suddenly back and gyrated round and round, then back and forth, moving, as it did so, that mop of hair, which, as the movements of the scalp ceased, rose up as do the bristles on a wild hog's back. Never before had I seen such gymnastics; never since have I seen his equal.

But an instant did it take for these things to come and pass. I alone saw him, and he alone saw my face, for my form closed the jar of the door. We raised our fists as by a signal, and then, just as the teacher's voice broke upon the air, we sprang at each other as do boys who hate each other. Boys fight with teeth and fists and finger nails and feet, and so did we, to the credit of the most vicious. Unmindful of blow or bruise, of bite or finger clutch, we fought in a manner worthy of those who fight in behalf of a good cause, but neither good nor bad cause had we for which to fight. It was simply

fight. The bruises made by the stony pavement on which we rolled were unfelt, the blow of the fist that "smashed" my nose and bloodied my face and garments gave me no pain, the bite that left the print of two sets of teeth on my arm did not concern me. I gave as good as I received — that point alone was my ambition — and when we two combatants were parted by Professor Drake and Mr. Nordman it would have been difficult to say whether either had been punished more than the other. "A devilish good fight on short notice," said Mr. Nordman, in a tone that bespoke no ill will; but Prof. Drake took another view of the matter. A gross breach of discipline had been committed and a strict rule of the school broken.

We were led inside, and then Prof. Drake chalked two small circles on the floor. Side by side, each in his ring, stood the Red-Headed Boy and myself, both defiant, each more vicious than before. My blood was scattered over his garments, and clumps of his red hair were sticking between my fingers. The eye next me was closed, the ear on the same side was lacerated and bloody. "A devilish spunky pair, I say," added Mr. Nordman, who now occupied a chair on the rostrum beside Prof. Drake. But the indignant teacher made no reply.

"Samuel Drew," he spoke severely, "explain to me the cause of this disgraceful affair."

I made no answer. There was no "cause" to explain.

"Did this boy say anything to warrant you in striking him?"

"No, sir."

"Did he strike you first?"

"No, sir."

"Had he struck you previously?"

"No, sir."

"Did he give you reason to fight?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing."

"*Nothing!* and yet gave you reason to fight him," said the teacher ironically.

"Yes, sir," I answered.

Turning to the other boy, Mr. Drake asked:

"Did Sammy say anything to you?"

"Nuthin'."

"Did he strike you first?"

"No."

"Have you and Sammy fought before this time?"

"No."

"Why did you fight?"

"Fer nuthin'."

The eyes of Drake dropped to the floor. As they did so, the lacerated ear of the Red-Headed Boy, the ear toward me, moved up and down, back and forth. The young devil was mocking me again. I could not answer him in the same way, but I scraped a tuft of his hair from between my fingers, and as he eyed me, slyly I twirled it before his gaze. The war was still on.

"It will do no good to flog these boys," said Mr. Nordman, who it could be seen was not disturbed over the combat.

"I am not in favour of physical punishment," answered the professor. "I do not whip boys. Discipline, however, is necessary. I *must* punish them severely."

"Professah," spoke Mr. Nordman, "will you permit me, sah, to make a suggestion?"

"Certainly. I shall value it."

"I am an old man and have learned some things as I have passed along. Blood is blood, sah, and blood counts. Young folks are not old folks. I cannot say that I can see anything wrong about what these boys have done, unless it be in the place selected for the fight. It wah fair on both sides, and neither of them showed the white feather. School is for study, I'll admit, but not all of it can be study and, by Gad! when the time comes that American boys are punished for an innocent tussle and taught never to fight, sah, the prospect for our country is devilish bad, Professah!"

Again the professor flushed.

"I am an old man, Professah Drake, and you will take kindly what I have to say. Don't punish the boy who faces the music, but him who runs away. If you'll persuade Sammy to fight no mo'ah during school hours, I ansah for that chap," and he pointed to my antagonist. "But unless something strongah than yoah rules prevent, they will fight it out yet, sure as shooting, Professah."

Professor Drake mused a moment.

"Sammy, take your place at your desk," he said, Looking about the room, he selected a vacant seat. separated quite a distance from my bench, for the new boy.

CHAPTER XLII

SUSIE'S INTRODUCTION TO THE STRINGTOWN SCHOOL

AS I sat at my desk that afternoon, my mind reverted to the past. I recalled that it had really been predicted that this boy and I were to be antagonists. Then, as my meditating mind drew a still clearer view of the past, I recalled the exact words of the black omen-reader who had warned me to "Beware of the Red-Head Boy!" Back and forth ran fragments of the long-neglected prediction, until at last I caught another sentence: "Et say dat de Red-Head Boy 'll die sudden, an' dat yo' an' Susie 'll be de cause; an' dat yo 'll die sudden, an' dat de Red-Head Boy an' Susie 'll be de cause."

There sat the evil object of the omen-reading seer; and then, as the last part of the sentence ran again through my mind, I glanced over among the girls, at one who came among us in the early part of the present session. I remember that morning well. She was accompanied by old negro Cupe, who stood with bare head beside the open door while her name was being recorded and her bench place selected. Every morning the negro brought his charge to the door, every evening when school was dismissed he stood patiently waiting outside. A little, shrinking bit of a girl was she, strangely dressed, neat, clean, starched and prim. I recall her timid look as she stood that morning before Professor Drake — the shy

glance she shot about the room, the shrinking, drooping eye that fell to the floor as she met the gaze of those about, for all eyes were fixed upon her — a new scholar.

"Your name, child?" asked Professor Drake, who with pen in hand was prepared to enter the name on the school record. It was merely a question of formality, for all of Stringtown knew the girl, all of Stringtown knew her history, how she had disappeared when the two negroes did and returned again with them from Canada.

"Susie," was the low answer.

"Your other name, please?"

"I am only Susie."

I who sat near caught the flush on her cheek as her eyes drooped.

The teacher seemed inclined to ask another question. Then, perhaps because he too noticed the cheek flush, forbore and motioned her to be seated.

"Children," he said, speaking to the school, "we have a new scholar to-day, one long absent from Stringtown, but whom I have wished since her return to number among us. This child" — and he looked at Susie — "deserves to be treated with the utmost kindness. She is my especial charge for she has excited my personal interest. While no favouritism can be shown by me for or against any pupil, still I wish it to be known that whoever mistreats this child will incur my severest displeasure; and that those who aid and favour her will please me very much. Let the older girls take an interest in her welfare by assisting the little girl in every way possible, and in making her school-days pleasant." Then looking about the room, he said: "My child take your seat at the desk with Jennie Man-

ley." Jennie Manley was the youngest daughter of the planter who had suddenly died one night a few months before.

And so Susie came shrinkingly into the Stringtown school in the commencement of this session, the school I had dumbly attended all my school life, and to which, now came the Red-Headed Boy of Nordman. We three were at last together in the same room.

The girls of our Stringtown school gave Susie a warm reception; they opened their hearts to the waif, and soon the wild child was made to feel at home. Bright and cheerful, grateful for little kindnesses, she made for herself a place in each heart, and Professor Drake had no need to ask further favours in her behalf.

Not so warm was the reception the boys of our school gave "Red-Head." His advent, it is true, had been such as to merit their admiration, and his subsequent deportment was defiant enough to please any Kentucky-bred boy. But he made no friends. He came alone to school each morning, alone he left when study hours were over. During recess, if the weather was fair, he sat on the fence and whittled, taking no part in the games of the boys; if the weather was bad he sought a lone spot inside the room. His sarcastic face leered at all who approached him. Within a week no boy spoke to him, he in turn gave no word to others, and an occasional cat wail could be heard when his back was turned. But no other boy sought a direct quarrel. By common consent, it seemed, the field was left for us — we two who were conspicuous in that we never looked at each other and alone gave no taunt when accident brought us together; too deep was the hatred that down in our natures spoke from each to the other, rendering no taunt necessary. War had been declared when first we

met, and it seemed evident that no peace could come between us until the fight had been finished.

And so the "Red-Head" came and went; never did he seem to look at any girl, surely he did not speak to any boy. As I recall those days I perceive, as I could not then, that if ever a boy stood isolated in the world that Stringtown boy was alone. And as I think of the dreary part our school was to him, I cannot but question, had I not met him half way and struck that blow, would he have struck me? If we had not fought that afternoon in the old Stringtown schoolyard, would the chain of events that followed have been diverted? Had the boys and girls of our school sought to befriend him, as we might have done, and should have done, would the evil in his make-up have strengthened as it did? Would goodness and grace have upstarted and displaced the pernicious emotions that seemed to then dominate his life? I cannot answer, and these musings are not pleasant, for it is evident now that there was cause to seek for evil in myself.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CHALLENGE OF RED-HEAD

MEMORY is not less vivid than is sight. I can see that uncouth boy now as plainly as I saw him then. Sitting on the line fence that separated our school from the neighbour on the south, his favourite place was a conspicuous locust post, that near the pike line gave a good view both up and down the street. His employment consisted in watching this road, whittling a stick and sharpening his great horn-handled knife. I might say that his main object seemed to be to scan the pike; for even while whittling, his bright, little eyes were ever glancing about as though he were expecting some one. Watchful may better express the sensation that comes now to my mind as I reflect over his method and deportment. That knife needs also a word, for it was ever in his hand. It was not an ordinary pocket-knife, but big enough to "stick a hog." True, the blade closed into a rude buckhorn handle, still it was not such a clasp-knife as merchants carry in stock. It seemed to have been rudely made by a blacksmith. Be that as it may, Red-Head knew how to use it. Indifferent to our games or pastimes, he held himself aloof, knife in hand, perched upon the fence, gazing up the pike. Yet occasionally he did take part in some boyish turn.

We were playing at hop-skip-and-jump, we schoolboys. The game had drawn itself down until the two

rival jumpers of the school confronted each other. Every boy but Red-Head had taken part, and he, indifferent, sat on the fence idly gazing first up the pike and then down upon the striving contestants below him. A sneer from some boy met his ear, but sneers were not new to him.

"Afraid to jump, Red-Head?" cried one.

"Who's afeard?"

"Red-Head!" piped in another.

Slowly climbing down from his perch on the opposite side of the fence from us, the mountain boy closed his knife, and with a run and a jump sprang straight toward the tall fence. High into the air his lithe form rose, drew itself into a knot as the top of the fence was reached, doubled a somersault in the air, then over without touching, over and far beyond was he when those heels struck and marked the soft earth. Never before had such a jump been made in the Stringtown school-yard — or rather, I should say, into the Stringtown school-yard. We village boys stood amazed at the feat of the youth from the mountains, who gave us no word, but went back to his post, climbed the fence and turned his gaze again toward the south.

Some time after that we were shooting at a mark, the weapon being a rifle of small bore (a squirrel rifle), the object a sheet of paper on a plank against a distant tree. "Strange amusement that for children!" some may say. True, but I speak of Kentucky in the 'sixties. Again some defiant boy singled out Red-Head and challenged him to join us — *dared* him to shoot. Indifferent as he had been in the jumping contest did he seem in this. Leaning the gun we used against the fence, he stepped to the line, and before we could anticipate his object, from an inside pocket of his jacket he drew a bright

revolver. Raising it, without aiming, he fired and waited the result. Several boys sprang to the mark; there was the bullet hole in the plank far above the wildest shot we had made. A cry of derision, a series of cat mews, a chorus of sarcastic jeers, rang upon the air.

"Better git a rest," sneered one.

"Fools!" he said, "thet 's the mark ter shoot at. Ef yo' wah raised in the moun'ns, an' would shoot at a whole sheet ov papah, they 'd take yoah gun away an' drive yo' off. Thet 's the mark, I say — one bullet hole fer the centre an' five in a ring jest 'roun' et." As he spoke his arm was raised again, and as fast as the trigger could be pulled came five shots. Again we sprang to the distant mark, and there, in a close circle, equal distances apart, was a ring of little holes. I recall the exact words he had used, "One bullet hole fer the centre an' five in a ring jest 'roun' et."

But, alas! our challenge resulted in disaster to the expert marksman. No boy of the Stringtown school was permitted to carry a pistol. That weapon was positively prohibited by Professor Drake, who considered the carrying of a pistol by a boy to be sufficient cause for expulsion. We had been deeply absorbed in our sport, and as the hand that held the spent revolver dropped, the boy who held it was taken by the shoulder in the firm grasp of our teacher, who, unperceived by us, had from behind joined the group, every eye of which had been fixed on the mark.

Red-Head was led away by his captor, while we who had been the cause of his arrest, but who had escaped, hung our heads.

In a moment the bell calling us to the room rang, and knowing that trouble was in the air, we sought our

places. There sat the teacher; near him the empty revolver lay on the table, and before him stood the captive child awaiting the outcome of the crime he had committed in thus breaking the strictest rule of our village school.

Then spoke Professor Drake, addressing the culprit: "It is against the rules of this school to carry concealed weapons. Some years ago a boy was killed by his classmate in this very yard, and since that no pistol has been allowed in school. I must punish you severely, but before doing so it is but just that I should ask why you have disgraced yourself by breaking this rule?"

"I hain't disgraced myself, an' I hain't hurt nobody."

"But you surely know that it is wrong to carry a weapon like this."

"It ain't wrong fer *me* ter carry et."

"It is never right to carry a pistol in a civilised community."

"Teachah, ef yo' knew my story, yo' would n't say et 's wrong fer *me* ter carry a gun. Ef yo' hed been through what I hev, an' looked fer what 's com'n', yo' d carry one too."

This was said half persuasively, half defiantly. The head of the boy was raised proudly; no appearance of shame bespread his face, no drooping glance. "I hed the gun in my pocket when I fought thet feller" (he pointed to me), "an' did n't use et. I don't intend ter shoot boys. I hain't but one use fer et, an' when the time comes I 'll need the gun awful bad, teachah."

"Tell me your story."

"Et 's too long, an' don't consarn nobody but me."

"Tell me why it is right for you to carry a pistol. I command it. Tell me all."

CHAPTER XLIV

RED-HEAD'S STORY OF THE FEUD

"I'M from the moun'ns, I am. I don't know jest now we'uns came ter live thar, an' et don't make no diff'r'nce. We always lived in the moun'ns ov East Kaintuck. Our house w'an't no great shakes, et jest hed two rooms an' a mud chimney. Thet's all.

"Dad said, said he, one day when I wah a little thing, an' he pinted back over the hog-back hill b'hind the cabin — 'Don't none ov yo' children cross the divide. Keep this side ov Bald Hill, fer thar's a feud' twixt Holcombs and we-uns.' I can't remember when he fust said this, et war when I war too little ter remember, but he said et often. An' we never crost the hog-back hill, none ov us, fer dad said thet the feud war off till the Holcombs er we-uns broke et by cross'n' the divide. An' es we grew bigger, brother Jim an' me, mam kept us up in the story ov the feud.

"'Ef et ever happens thet the feud es on ag'in,' sez she, 'thar won't be no end ter et es long es thar es a Holcomb er a Nordman livin'.' She said et hed been one ov the bloodiest feuds ov the moun'ns, an' more 'n a dozen hed been killed on each side, an' she showed us the row ov Holcombs on one side ov the graveyard an' the row of we-uns on tother side. I axed her what the feud war 'bout, but she said, said she: 'I don't jest remember. Et b'gun befoah I come inter the family, but

et don't make no diff'r'nce 'bout the beginnin', thet don't consarn us.'

"An' dad, he did n't talk much 'bout et neither, but when brother Jim an' I could hold a gun he taught us all 'bout shootin'! 'Et air fer bus'ness p'r'aps,' he said; 'ef the feud begins ag'in yo' boys 'll be in't.' There ain't no mo'ah ter say, teachah, 'bout the feud, an' I don't know nuthin' mo'ah. Jim an' me l'arned ter shoot, an' et did n't make much difference what et war we shot at, we hit et. An' dad grew monstrous proud ov us, an' one day I heerd him say ter mam thet he did n't care now ef the feud war on ag'in. But he kept tellin' me 'n Jim ter keep this side ov Bald Hill, an' we did. Jim war 'bout two years older then me, teachah.

"But one day we started a young deer, an' et run fer the divide. We hed n't no guns, fer we war out fishin', but es et war a leetle critter, we started ter try an' ketch et runnin'. We did n't notice whar et run, an' befoah I knew et, we war goin' down the moun'n tother side ov Bald Hill. Jim war ahead an' mighty close on the deer when bang went a gun in the thicket, an' Jim dropped."

Here the boy stopped, hung his head and drew his coarse sleeve across his eyes. "'Scuse me, teachah," he said, "I ain't used t' talkin', an' et makes me tired t' speak so 'long."

In a moment he resumed: "I run t' Jim an' raised his head, but et war no use, he did n't know me. He war dead. A minie ball hed gone in jest above one ear an' out jest below tother. I could n't do nuthin' fer Jim, an' so I drapped him an' started ter sneak fer the thicket. I wanted ter see who done the shootin', an' I did see, too. I did n't go straight for the spot, but snook ter the right an' got inter a hollah, an' then I crept up till I come near ter the place the smoke come from, but thar

want no one thar. Jest then I looked back, an' slippin' 'long the hillside, I saw a man stooped over tryin' ter keep the laurel thicket 'twixt Jim an' hisself. He got 'twixt an' old stump an' Jim an' cocked his gun an' looked up. He war a monstrous tall man, Old Holcomb. He could see Jim a-layin' thar, but he did n't seem ter care fer him, an' I saw thet he war lookin' fer me. Lord, teachah, ef I hed only hed my gun then!

"But es I did n't, I jest laid low an' then slipped inter the briars, an' sneaked 'roun' the hill an' made fer home.

"Mam an' dad an' little Sis war sittin' at the table eatin' supper when I stepped inter the door. 'Whar 's Jim?' mam axed.

"'Shot!'

"Dad got up an' pinted ter Bald Hill. 'Hev yo' boys crost the divide?'

"'Yes.'

"'Es he dead?'

"I jest put a finger on each side ov my head. 'Minie ball,' was all I said. 'He 's lyin' jest over the hog-back.'

"Dad turned ter the fireplace an' took down his big b'ar gun — the big b'ar gun — 'I 'll bring Jim home. Yo' folks keep in the cabin till I come. Don't yo' go out.'

"'The feud 's on ag'in,' war all mam said. But she blew the coals up an' commenced ter run bullets fer the big gun an' she set me ter cleanin' up the rifle an' revolvers.

"But dad did n't come home till long after dark, an' he did n't come home then nuther. Sis an' I went ter sleep, but I guess mam did n't, fer 'bout daylight I war waked by a knock on the door, an' es I opened my eyes I saw she war dressed. She took down the ir'n bar an' let dad in; he hed Jim in his arms. 'The feud 's on,'

he said. 'Thar 'll be a grave dug 'cross the hill too when we bury Jim. Et war a long shot, but I caught him through the winder.'

"'Who 'd yo' git?' asked mam.

"'Don't know whether 't is the old man er the boy, they 're 'bout the same size, but et's one ov 'em.'

"Well, teachah, we buried Jim in our row, an' next day Sam Holcomb war buried in thern. Then we all got ready ter kill an' be killed. Thar wa'n't much ter do but ter kiver the winders close, ter keep the guns clean an' then sneak in an' out the house. Et war watch an' sneak an' hunt an' sneak. We killed all our dogs 'ceptin' one fice thet stayed in the house ter bark, fer they hedn't sense 'nough ter keep out ov sight, an' ef a dog war seen in the bushes et would give us away. One night mam war shot by a ball that come through the winder. Et war jest a little crack, but big 'nough ter let light out an' a bullet in. She wa'n't killed dead, but she could n't live long, an' she knowed et. 'Red,' she said ter me, 'take good care ov little Sissie. She air too young to fight, but when she 's grown up she 'll marry an' raise a family ter help carry on the feud. An' Red,' she said, 'make me one promise.'

"'Go on, mam, I 'll do et.'

"'Don't yo' let up on the feud, Red. Et must be ter the end.'

"'Yo' need n't make me promise thet,' I said, 'I 'll fight et out.'

"'I'd die happy ef your dad were livin' ter help yo'.'

"'Never mind dad,' I said. 'Thar air only one feller left over the hill, the old man. Dad shot three ov 'em before they got him, an' I shot one, an' we can't expect ter hev all the luck.'"

Here the teacher interrupted. "Why did n't you go

for a doctor? Perhaps your mother's wound might not have been necessarily fatal."

"Doctor nuthin'. Thar wa'n't no doctor 'n fifteen miles ov our place; b'sides, ef I hed opened the door thet night I 'd hev got a ball too. Yo' don't know nuthin' 'bout the moun'ns an' the feuds, teachah."

"You say that your father had been killed?"

"Yes; fergot ter mention et, but he hed been shot down 'bout a month befoah. Next mornin' I shut Sis in the cabin an' sneaked over ter Jones' an' axed him ter come an' bury mam; an' I tell yo', teachah, things war monstrous quiet 'bout our place fer a time after thet. Sis hed l'arned ter keep still an' stay in the house. She war only 'bout three years old, but she hed seen some bad dahs, teachah, an' hed lots ov sense fer sech a little thing. Jim war shot, dad war shot, an' mam war shot, but thar wa'n't but one Holcomb left. An' it war Sis er me next ef I could n't git him first!"

For the second time the narrator stopped and drew his coarse sleeve slowly across his eyes. "Et makes me tired, I says, ter talk so long, teachah, but I 'll git my wind an' be rested in a minit." Then he continued: "I war too little ter use the big gun, an' hed ter trust to the pistol er the light rifle, an et wa'n't fair now, fer Tom Holcomb war the tallest man I ever seed, an' he shot with a Springfield musket. But when a feller 's in a feud, et don't make no difference 'bout the size. Et 's kill er git killed. I did what I promised mam I 'd do es best I could. I hed n't much chance, fer I hed ter slip in an' out the cabin an' watch fer my own life an' care fer Sis an' try ter git a bead on Holcomb. But 't wa'n't no use, things war ag'in me. I slipped out one mornin' through the back door ter git some meal, fer thar wa'n't a bite ov bread in the place, an' when I came

back the front door war wide open. When I saw thet open door I feared et meant trouble. I crept inter the house the back way, an' thar in the open door, huggin' her little rag doll, sat Sissie. I could see the head ov the doll over her shoulder. The sun war shinin' bright in her face, her back war toward me, her little head leaned ag'in the side ov the door, an' she looked es sweet es a pictur. 'Sis,' I said, 'Sissie, yo' mussent sit in the door; Tom Holcomb 'll git you, Sis.' But she did n't say nuthin'. 'Guess she 's asleep,' I thought, an' slipped ter her side an' jumped at her an' cried, '*Boo! Boo!*' But she did n't move."

The boy's head dropped again, his chest heaved convulsively. Sob after sob broke the air. Suddenly controlling himself, he defiantly turned toward us boys. "I 'll thrash the feller what laughs et me. I ain't a coward ef I did cry."

"My child," said the teacher, as he brushed away a tear from his own eyes, for the affecting climax came so suddenly as to unnerve him too, "no one blames you for crying. I condemn myself for leading you to tell in public this pathetic story of your life. It is I who am in fault, but I did not know what was coming. It is a shame."

"Yes," answered the boy, "et war a shame ter shoot sech a chunk ov lead through sech a little bit ov a girl. Thet bullet war big 'nough ter kill a b'ar. But I 'll git even with Holcomb yit."

"I meant that it is a shame that I let you tell this sorrowful story here."

"Et ain't done yet, teachah. The little thing hed opened the door ter sit in the sunshine, an' a bullet the size ov your thumb hed ploughed through her chest an' out her back. I picked her up an' laid her on the bed,

an' then took an' old satchel an' put a few things intet et (I hed n't much) an' carefully wrapped up the little bloody doll, an' put thet on top. I hain't got nuthin' else now ter mind me ov Sissie but thet doll. I barred the front door an' slipped out the back way, out an' over the spur ter Jones's house. I took my pistol — thet 's the very pistol" (he pointed to the weapon on the table) "an' left the guns an' everything else.

"'Et ain't fair,' I said ter Jones; 'Holcomb's too big fer me.'

"'Goin' ter run away?' said Jones.

"No; goin' ter go away ter grow bigger. Tell Tom Holcomb thet ef he wants me I 'll be in Stringtown on the Pike."

"'An' ef he don't foller yo'?'

"'When I 'm big 'nough ter handle a Springfield gun I 'll be back ag'in. Tell him the feud 's on till one er the other ov us es shot.'

"'An' Sissie! air yo' goin' ter leave Sissie?'" said Jones.

"'She don't need me no longer. Yo 'll find her on the bed in the cabin. Bury her in the row, 'longside ov mam. I shan't go ter the buryin', fo' I can't run no risk ov old Holcomb's gun.'

"Thet 's all, teachah."

Drawing the child to his side, Professor Drake gently smoothed the unkempt red hair, parting it with his fingers in the place a part should be, but seldom before had been seen. Then he spoke:

"And you expect Mr. Holcomb to follow you to Stringtown?"

"I looks fer him every minit, an' I hev ter watch sharp. Thar ain't no other head like mine, an' es soon es he sots eyes on et he 'll draw his gun. Thet 's why

I sits on the fence-post watchin' the pike; ef I cotch sight ov him first, et 'll help me powerful much."

"If he observes you before you see him?"

"Holcomb's a dead shot, teachah, an' my head 's a good mark. Thar ain't much chance. Teachah," he continued, "please give me back my pistol an' give me leave ter carry et, fer I needs et bad. I hain't no other friend this side ov the graveyard in the moun'ns. Ef I fights any ov these 'ere boys I 'll use my fists er a stick er a stone. I 'll bite an' scratch, like the girls do, I 'll pull hair like thet feller" (he pointed to me). "I promise thet I 'll not use a gun lessen Holcomb comes. Ef he does, et 'll mean the endin' of the feud one way er tother, an' ef I hain't no gun et 'll be his way sure. I 'm a bad boy, teachah, es yo' folks looks et me, but yo' hain't seed things es I 've seed 'em. Yo' wa'n't raised in the moun'ns, an' none ov yo' hain't no feud ter fight out. Please give me back my gun. I 'll jest set on the fence and won't bother nobody."

Deeply moved by Red-Head's dramatic story, Prof. Drake stood for some moments in silent meditation. "I perceive there comes a time," he mournfully said to himself, "when duty demands that wrong be continued in behalf of wrong that has been established. Alas, the law under which these people live makes that which we call wrong into what they call right! It is wrong for me to allow this boy to carry a pistol with murder in his heart, and surely that is the object. But a greater wrong it would be to render him defenseless, for he might in that condition encounter his enemy, the misguided armed man, who would shoot him on sight." Then taking the revolver from the table, the teacher handed it to the pleading boy. "Child," he gently said, "as a special privilege, I give you permission to

carry this weapon, which you need to defend your life, but I shall speak to Mr. Nordman concerning this affair, and endeavour to reach and disarm Mr. Holcomb, or at least prevail on him to keep away from Stringtown."

"Nordman knows all 'bout it, and he takes my part. But yo' needn't try t' stop Holcomb. He knows every hole in the moun'ns, an' he don't intend t' quit 'till the feud's fought t' the end. No one kin edge in. It's him an' me fer et, teachah."

CHAPTER XLV

"TELL ME, JENNIE, TELL ME WHAT IT IS"

THE fall session passed, the holidays came and went, the spring session had nearly worn itself away. The evil predictions concerning us three children had passed from my mind, and no longer disturbed over the Red-Head Boy, I looked forward to the coming autumn, when I hoped that my life in the Stringtown school would terminate. The session's close approached, Susie in loving friendship with all the girls, my antagonist without a friend among the boys. Well do I remember that fateful last morning.

That morning, of which the date is lost and need not be revived, for the story I have to relate does no credit to any day, the girls of the Stringtown school were, I perceived as I sat in place before school opened, in subdued excitement. Whispering groups in earnest conversation indicated that something of importance had occurred to disturb them. When a boy chanced to approach the lips would cease to move, but would begin to buzz again on his departure, indicating that the subject-matter was fit only for girls to hear. I sat alone in my place, and so did Red-Head. We two boys had troubles of our own. Red-Head and I had met again, had "mouthed" each other, had parted to await by appointment the ending of the session now near at hand. I knew full well that Professor Drake would not overlook a second fight, and my antagonist knew that Mr.

Nordman had promised that he should be obedient and break no rules. He sulked in his place, scowling at whomsoever chanced to meet his gaze, while I sat glumly in my place meditating over the coming fight. The prediction of the old negro Cupe sprang to my mind; I looked across the room to the girls. Susie was not in her place. Then it was that I first chanced to observe the whispering group with heads close pressed together, and as the moments passed I sat silently eyeing them, studying their movements, and at last I concerned myself enough to wonder what could have occurred to create such subdued excitement in their ranks.

The door opened, and Susie tripped into the room. I watched her as she passed down the open space before the door, across and past the spot where once the teacher had marked two circles on the floor for Red-Head and me to stand in, until she reached a group of girls who, on opposing seats, sat with heads together, leaning across the aisles. These girls shrank back, gazing intently into her face as she drew near, but made no offer to return the pleasant greeting. A cold stare was their response, and beneath it the smile on Susie's face disappeared. She was only a child, but no words were necessary to tell to her the story carried by those unfeeling eyes and shrinking forms. She passed along with downcast face her satchel of books hanging upon her arm. From the cheek toward me the blood had fled, leaving a surface white as dough; I saw those roses fade as I have sometimes seen a beautifully tinted evening cloud deaden and turn to leaden hue. Down the aisle toward her own desk passed the child while on either side, peering at her as girls who have the devil in their hearts only can, sat those Stringtown girls. But Susie looked neither to the right nor to the left, although it could be seen that she

felt the touch of those scornful eyes. Her deskmate, Jennie Manley, the youngest daughter of the "upright" Mr. Manley, sat in her place; but as Susie approached she too drew away as though the touch of the garment of the approaching girl might be unclean. The child stopped short, the satchel of books slipped from her nerveless arm and fell upon the floor. Pleadingly she raised her clasped hands, then dropped into her seat and imploringly turned her pallid face upon her deskmate. Her form seemed to draw into itself as does the delicate, shrinking, sensitive plant when touched by a rough hand. Her words came low and tremulous, but I caught them:

"Tell me, Jennie! tell me what it is!"

For reply the deskmate drew back again. Then came whispers from about; the busy tongues of Stringtown girls were loosed. Slowly the kneeling child arose, and turned back toward the door; she did not stop to pick up the fallen satchel; a rosy apple touched by her foot rolled across the floor to the rostrum, but she heeded it not. The whispers grew louder as she passed back along that vacated aisle, and then as she reached the middle of the open space before the door, one tongue, bolder and more vicious than the others, sang in sarcastic monotone, "*Only Susie, Nigger Susie, Nigger Susie!*"

Had the girl been instantly petrified she could not have stopped more suddenly. A pallor came over her face. Her beseeching eyes wandered about from one to another as if appealing for help from a sympathetic soul, but no response other than a malicous stare met her gaze, and she turned again toward the door.

The Red-Headed Boy of Nordman sprang across the floor and threw his left arm about the shrinking girl, who dropped her head convulsively upon his shoulder. Raising his clenched fist, he shook it viciously at the

group of girls, and shouted: "I kin thrash the brother ov the girl who said them words ter this un!" Giving them no time to reply, he continued: "I kin thrash any boy in school ov my size! I 'm a bad boy from the Kaintuck moun'ns, but I ain't bad 'nough ter be a brother ter sech a set es you-uns! I 'm awful mean an' bad! I kin knock the eyes out ov a pig an' watch et stumble 'bout; I kin pull the legs off ov a frog an' watch et try ter hop; I kin break the wings ov a bird an' watch et flutter — them 's the things I kin do! Whatever 's bad es fun fer me! I kin do anything mean thet any other boy ever did, but I ain't mean er bad 'nough ter be a brother ter sech a set es you-uns! Bring on yer brothers, I says, bring 'em one at a time er two at a clip, an' I 'll thrash the lot! I'll fight with fist er teeth er club er stone er gun! I 'm Nordman's Red-Head Boy, I am — thet's what yo' calls me, an' thet's me, an' I 'm a devilish bad un! I 've killed my man too up in the moun'ns, an' I 'll kill another er get shot myself."

He stood defiant, vicious, malignant. The skin on his head began to wabble, as if making sport of his hearers; the ears moved back and forth again as they did the day I faced him; and I saw, too, that he and Susie stood together on the spot where he and I had once stood. But my admiration for him now supplanted my hatred. I sprang from my place and moved toward the two children, holding out my hand. "Let me be with you and Susie," I said, "we three together. Let us be friends."

"Back," he cried, "er I 'll hit yo'! I want no friend in Stringtown! I hate yo' all, I hate everbody on earth. I hate Susie, too, 'cause she 's been born, but I takes up fer her now not 'cause I cares fer her, but 'cause yo' all hev thrown her down."

"You need not hate me any longer, I am your friend now!" I cried.

"I 'll hit yo' ef yo' don't go back! I ain't no friend of yourn ef yo' air ov mine. We 'll fight et out day after school closes."

In a very different tone he spoke now to Susie. "We two air alone, Susie. Yo' hain't no name ter be proud ov, an' I hain't never hed none at all. You 're 'only Susie,' an' I 'm only Red Head. I 'll take yo' home ter nigger Cupe, an' I 'll thrash the feller what insults yo' ever ag'in." He looked at the girls and spoke in an earnest tone, and with language such as I could not have expected him to use. "Girls, yo' air meaner 'n pison an' sneakiner 'n snakes. This un hain't done yo' no harm, an' she ain't ter blame fer the deviltry ov the coward ov a father who desarted her. I hearn all yoah whisperin'; my ears kin stand up an' cotch mighty low sounds. I know all yo' said, an' I answers all ov yo' now. I takes back what I promised the teachah 'bout shootin' in this school. I 'll shoot the brother ov the first girl who even makes another whisper 'gainst this one. Ef she ain't no brother I 'll shoot her dad, an' ef she hain't no dad" — he stopped — "I 'll take et out ov her own hide, but I 'll not kill her. Don't fergit what I says, fer I means et.

"Come, Susie," he continued, "we hev no use fer this place now. Yo' an' me air alone in the world. Yo' air Susie nobody an' I am nobody, the Red-Head." Turning to me, he added: "Yo' wants ter shake hands, but we two don't shake no hands till after the fight. I 'll meet yo' in Indian Hollah where yo' said yo 'd be the mornin' after school shets up, but thar ain't ter be no shakin' ov hands."

Never again did either he or she enter the door of the Stringtown school.

CHAPTER XLVI

"STRANGE SENSATION THAT, THE BEGINNING OF LOVE"

THE morning after the close of school found me alone, on my way to the appointed spot. Spring had opened, the blue-grass was tall in the fence corners, the corn in the field had been thinned and ploughed for the first time, the apple bloom had long since fallen, and the approach of summer had been heralded by several hot days that had successively grown hotter. I stopped in the back yard of our home before crossing the fence that bounded the pasture, and climbed a pole that held aloft a box in which a pair of bluebirds nested. Inside it were two little ones. I took them carefully out of their nest, looked into their ugly open mouths and replaced them not less carefully. Then I descended and moved slowly onward, for I was ahead of time. Next I lingered on the edge of the pond that had been made by damming the ravine that crossed the back pasture. Muskrat holes were in abundance along the bank, and as I stood quietly, a head rose in the water near my feet, then disappeared as the timid creature caught sight of my intruding form.

War was in my heart, but not war against the innocent. More than one rabbit hopped from cover and disappeared in the bushes as my foot crossed the briar patch beyond the pasture, but no stone followed. From the tip of a fence post on the right a male partridge

sang "Bob White!" to his nesting mate hidden near by in the grass, and from the fence on my left came the answering cry of another partridge. Both birds were singing undisturbed when I passed from sight. Instinct, I suppose, led me to thrust a long pole into a hollow log in the thick woods that lay just beyond the briar patch, and to my surprise out came a snarling fuzzy opossum that when touched gently by the stick turned on its side, coiled itself into a ball, closed its eyes, raised its lips and laughed silently. I moved onward, leaving the grinning beast unharmed. Through these woods and then over the hill I passed, into the meadow, over the next ridge and down its side into Indian Hollow. As I turned the top of the last ridge I caught sight of a distant form, that of a boy about my own size, who, mounting the opposing ridge, directed his steps down the slope toward the point I was approaching. It was Red-Head, my expected antagonist, who true to his agreement, met me in the ravine where tradition said rested the dead Indians. Not a word did either of us say as we slowly neared each other; there was no necessity for words, we knew our errand. I wore a roundabout jacket, which, just before we met, I jerked off and threw upon the ground. But he, the vicious boy of recent days, folded his arms across his chest, lifted his head and made no aggressive movement. I raised my fists and prepared for the tussle, but instead of a like movement, he said: "Hit me in the face; hit me hard!"

Nor did he yet make any offensive motion, neither did he offer to protect himself. "Hit me, I says! Take thet club!" (he pointed to a heavy stick.) "Beat me on the head!"

I gazed at him in amazement, but made no movement.

I was so near that as he spoke I felt his warm breath in my face.

"I'm a fool an' yo're afeard!" he said. "Ef yo' war in my place an' me in yourn I'd beat yo' down befoah a minit passed. I tell yo' I want ter be beat in the face, I want ter be knocked down, an' yo're afeard ter do et."

"I did n't come here to beat a boy with folded arms; I came to fight."

"Yo' can't fight me. Not because I don't want ter fight, fer I do, but because I've been a fool."

"Why?"

"I promised not ter fight yo', but I did n't promise not ter show yo' thet I'm not afeard of bein' hurt. I'll not strike back, but I dare yo' ter beat my head with the club. I wants ter git paid fer bein' a fool. I'll not flinch. Hit me, I say."

"I shall not do it. Who made you promise not to fight me?"

His eyes snapped. "Nobody *made* me, I don't allow no one ter make me do nuthin'. I jest promised not ter fight yo', an' I'll do what I promised."

"Whom did you promise?"

"Susie."

He stood before me with folded arms, this wild mountain boy, my mortal enemy. "Susie begged me not ter fight yo', an' I promised. I'm a fool, but not a coward."

"Why did she beg this of you?"

"I don't know an' I don't care. She says thet I did n't do yo' fair when yo' offered ter stand by me in school. She 's a girl, an' she cried when I told her thet I intended ter thrash yo' ter-day, an' I promised not ter do et; but I hate yo' like sin, an' yo' hate me, an' I

know et. We 'll come tergether some day, yo' an' me."

"You need n't talk so sure about whipping me," I replied. "You would have had to work before you thrashed me. I don't thank Susie for interfering any more than you do," I continued, "but if you can't fight me now I 'll not hit you now." He made a grimace at me and turned to depart. Disdain was in his eye, hatred was in his heart, but the wild beast had found his master in a little girl.

I stood until he had passed over the hill; not once did he glance back; then as his head disappeared beneath its summit I sank upon the grass. A double sensation came over me; regret that the boy had met Susie was commingled with elation in the thought that she had endeavoured to prevent him from hurting me. Why should I have experienced either sensation? But I did, and my mental argument was carried further. "Might not I have hurt *him?*" came next in the thought line; "and might not her care have been for *him?*"

Strange sensation that, the beginning of love! I had previously thought of the girl as I would of any other person; until now, only as I would of any other child; but when my antagonist told me of her care for one of us two, and said that she extracted from him the promise not to fight, I hated him the more for that fact. I hated him now, strangely enough, because of Susie — the girl I had not seen for weeks, never in my life had tried to meet, and who had not even entered my thoughts since last we met.

It seems almost like romance to say that love, such as sprang into my heart when my antagonist named that girl, could have had place in the soul of a child of my

age. When I came down that hillside to fight my antagonist I had no thought of love other than for my mother, and he whom I sought was but an enemy. When I passed back again along that same grassy slope he was not only an enemy but a rival, and I realised that I was in love with the outcast girl of Stringtown.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE VOICE OF THE NIGHT

THE war was long since over, peace had come to all the land. No armed men tramped our pike. The Blue and Grey had joined hands never to unclasp them.

Persistently since Mose the Jew gave us that money had I begged to be permitted to leave the Stringtown school, but my mother shrank from the parting; and so I returned time and again to my accustomed place in the front row among the little boys.

But finally a marvellous change came upon me, and, no longer a dumb child, I moved toward the advanced class of Stringtown. Possibly my previous dullness resulted from lack of expressive power, how else can one account for the sudden awakening of my intellect? Can brain cells store up impressions that lie temporarily beyond the will, but which are destined some day to open and become in an instant a fountain of stored knowledge? Be this as it may, my mind opened to books, and lessons of the past came vividly before me. In one year I caught up with my old classmates in most studies, but never in all, for those twenty-six rules in Brown's grammar stood unlearned yet to shame me. My unexpected progress excited the admiration of the old professor, and at last he asked my mother to permit me to seek an education in the North.

When, therefore, my mother finally agreed, Professor Drake arranged for me to enter a preparatory institution in one of the Northern States; and finally I left Stringtown, a passenger on the old stage-coach. Securely pinned in an inner pocket of my shirt rested the amount of money necessary for tuition, board and incidental school expenses, and in another pocket-book, an old timer that as a boy I had usually carried empty excepting a few reference cards and clippings of newspapers, was enough money to pay for my railroad ticket and my meals. Ignorant of the ways of the world, I started out in the world for an education, not schooling alone; for while education consists partly in book lore, it more largely comprehends wisdom gained outside of books. Astute old Professor Drake! Well did he recognise this fact. None knew better than he that so far as book study was concerned his Stringtown school offered advantages sufficient to carry me several years further — yes, perhaps to the door of the University.

I remember now that he once told mother in my presence that a boy should rub against others and become self-reliant; that he should conquer homesickness and learn to stand alone in the world, and that it is best, if he be possessed of good habits and strength of character, that he should experience these things before he becomes a man. "A child may retrieve himself in case he makes an error; a wise child is benefitted and profits by mistakes. Give a boy a chance to use his mind, and then, if he errs, as he will, encourage him to correct the error and profit by the lesson."

Prof. Drake had heen entrusted with the secret of our new-found wealth, and he it was who spread the information concerning my prospective school plans, adroitly adding that an unknown friend contributed the scholar-

ship. Evidently he foresaw that busy neighbors would question aloud as to how the Widow Drew could afford to spend money enough to educate her son abroad; and in order to quiet those "busybodies" he had assumed the "responsibility of the occasion."

But before I tell of things that occurred after I left Stringtown that autumn, in my round-about jacket, my long, baggy trousers, my dress that from shoe to cap pictured the crude country boy, it is my duty to relate the incidents that occurred the day before I left my home.

That day I bade all my friends in Stringtown farewell. Never since has parting from friend or home been to me so full of pathos.

"Sammy," said the grocer as he thrust into my pocket a present, that was already tied neatly, thus showing that he had thought of my departure, "don't forget Stringtown." And then he squeezed my hand until the fingers ached. As though I could ever forget my old home!

Venerable Judge Elford held me long by the hand, looking me full in the face. "Child, it has been many years since my boy Charley went from our village to a college in Ohio; he was about your age when he left Stringtown." Then his voice trembled, and he said no more. I knew the story of his boy; there was no need for him to tell it.

Nearing the home of Mr. Nordman, the old gentleman on the pike south of Stringtown, I first caught sight of a boy on the fence by the side of the front gate. It was Red-Head. I drew near, he gazed intently up the pike, toward the south, and gave me no recognition. I opened the gate and closed it. I could have touched him had I cared to do so, but neither of us gave the other the greeting of a glance.

"I BADE *all my Stringtown friends good-bye*"

"And so you start North to-morrow?" said Mr. Nordman.

"Yes."

"My hat, child; come with me." I handed it to him, and together we walked through the house and down the back walk, back to the graveyard where stood a single shaft. "You're going North, my boy, and you'll hear hard words about your Southern friends. Say nothing back; they of the North do not know us of the South; say no hard word back. We're whipped, Sammy, but we were men. My own dear boy, who loved the North, rests on yon side of that shaft. He to whom the South was dear sleeps on the other side. God grows the grass alike over each; the snowdrops bloom no earlier; the roses' scent is no sweeter, over the one than over the other. The wah is over, child."

The village clerk, Mr. Wagner, drew me down by his side as he seated himself on a bench. Alas! his chair was long since whittled into bits. "Have you told us all good-bye, Sammy?" he asked.

"Not all, yet."

He looked down a moment and whittled the stick he held in his hand. "Sammy," he said, "I have made one mistake in life, an honest man can make none greater. You will soon be old enough to know that to be happy you must be contented."

I looked at him curiously, for the expression was a conundrum, while he whittled again; then he stroked my chin gently with his lank forefinger, and next with the tips of his thumb and finger, he twitched a film of down that had appeared on my upper lip; then he continued:

"An old bachelor is not contented, Sammy. He's a misfit, and deserves the pity of mankind, and if he's

honest he won't deny it. It don't make any difference how he dresses, what he eats or drinks, he's only a human fragment, and if he don't say it openly he knows that it's true. Be a man, Sammy, and when you fall in love, as you will, tell your sweetheart you love her; then, when you are able to support her, marry her and live contentedly and respectably." The lank clerk heaved a deep sigh, but I made no answer. We parted and that sigh sounds yet in my ears when I think of Mr. Wagner.

So I went from end to end of Stringtown, bidding one and another farewell, getting blessings and advice — curious forms of advice and strange blessings.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE WEIRD FORM AGAINST THE SKY

THE years passed, and finally a well-formed and well-informed young man, I came home on top of the same old bus, driven by the same driver. Now I was ready to start out into the world to make a living, and I will add that a position had been offered me in a college well-known throughout our land, the position of assistant to the professor of chemistry.

The bus was late the afternoon I came home for the last time from school. The driver called me *mister* now and spoke in a formal manner that I did not like. For the first time I appreciated that I was no longer the Sammy Drew of former years. In deference to my request, he checked his team before my mother's door, where I alighted; before that time I should not have presumed to ask that favour, nor would he have granted it to little Sammy Drew.

I experienced a strange sensation that afternoon, for it seemed as though Stringtown no longer possessed me as a part of herself. I felt like a visitor. The houses, too, were surely very much smaller than when first I knew them; the pavements more narrow, the flat stones of the walks were uneven and very rough; strange that I had never before observed this last fact. A group of boys looked up at me as I passed; without a word of recognition they resumed their marble playing. I then felt a mental depression; for on that very spot but a

few years before, playing marbles, I kneeled in the dirt, a boy of Stringtown known to every other boy and knowing every boy. Again my heart sank, and yet again and again, as recurring incidents or new objects thrust upon me the fact that four years of absence may produce great changes in a village if the absent one was once really a part of the village. Only the person who looks with a stranger's eye will say that change comes not to human homes and human hearts in a sleepy village that seems to the indifferent observer to stand unchanged as decade after decade passes. Stringtown was no longer Stringtown to me, neither was I now a part of Stringtown's people. "Mr. Drew" and "Samuel" fell on my ears and grated on them, but there were a few exceptions; to some persons I was still Sammy. The man who first used that familiar term was Judge Elford. He took me by the hand and looked me in the face. "Sammy," he said, "you did not get into trouble and did not send for me, as I feared you might and asked you to do in case you needed me; you have my admiration. A splendid record you have made, but the end is not in sight; you may yet require my advice. Remember, Sammy, you promised to follow it when the time arrives."

I wandered into the pasture the next evening to watch the sun go down. First, the contact part of a cloud bank toward which I walked was tinted with a silver sheen, then as his form passed down behind the black body a ribbon of silver formed upon the undulating upper edge, a narrow border that from the earth on either side where cloud met horizon followed in veriest detail its uplifted undulations until the edge was all aglow in silver. The shadows fell about me as I still walked toward the cloud, following a path that led into the west.

The ribbon of changing colours faded out, and a strange, gloomy twilight seemed to fall upon me, although I knew that the sun had not yet touched the horizon and that the darkness was premature. Then deep down in the cloud, from a slender crevice that formed on the instant, a silver ray burst forth and, lighting up a spot of earth, illumined a motionless female form, before unseen, a form that in the sunburst I saw was that of Susie; but no longer a child, for the fleeting years had brushed the child away.

And then the ray of sunshine lifted, swept gracefully across the heavens as does a mighty searchlight, and glancing fell again to the earth, striking now the hill before me; but between the two earth touches the silver changed to red, and with the crimson came tinted shadows that played about the spot where rested now the red sun ray. But to these I gave no further notice; for from where I stood in the valley I saw uprise upon the summit of the hill a form that seemed more than twice human height. But a moment shone the red glare, for night settled quickly down, leaving only the outline of that form against the uprising cloud bank. Then curious movements possessed the sky picture, the erect form changed to that of a bent figure; the hands and arms moved strangely out and in, and at one time, with outstretched arm leaned forward, pointing into the valley beyond, where lay the Stringtown graveyard. Nor was that form alone, for an object heretofore unseen sped from near him and flitted along the path. But as it did so the upright figure uttered a cry, shrill, wild, like that of a savage. As the cry struck the air, the small creature scampered back affrighted and clasped his little arms tightly about the long legs of the erect being, whatever it might have been. Too old was I now to fear goblin

or ghost, too skeptical had I become to believe in spook of any kind, else I should have turned and fled from the spot; for it seemed as though that picture against the sky could not be natural. Then while yet I gazed the form suddenly fell to the ground and disappeared from sight; and as it did so a wild cry floated to my ear, followed by a laugh that might have been human, but which seemed not like any other laugh my ear had ever heard. Then came silence.

Instead of turning back, as once I should have done, I started forward, following the path in the meadow toward the summit of the hill; but when I neared the spot where once had stood the apparition nothing could be seen. Too dark was it now to distinguish objects. I lingered a moment and then strode on, when my foot struck a soft obstacle in the path. I stooped and reached down. My hands surely touched the form of a child — my fingers followed the bare legs and feet, then passed over the face of a child. Raising the little form in my arms, I moved to the right, toward the spot where on the hill I had seen the girl standing in the silver light.

CHAPTER XLIX

SUSIE, RED-HEAD, AND SAMUEL DREW

AGAIN in the night I stood before the cabin of Cupe, where I hesitated a moment before the door. I dreaded to meet the superstitious old negro. The experience of that first night, when, a child, I ran terrified into the open door, the incident that occurred during the second nocturnal visit, when the strange night voice spoke twice in my ear, coupled with the cold reception that he gave me then, led me to hesitate before again entering that abode. And then I remembered that he had predicted my coming thrice in the night, and I had vowed that I would not do so. I felt now an antagonism toward him not only on account of his having involved me in his superstitions, but also because his predictions had been partly verified. For the third time, notwithstanding my assertion never to do so again, I stepped out of the night into the cabin of Cupe, who seemed not at all surprised at my entrance.

"Brung de gem'n a cheer, Dinah."

"Don't concern yourself about me, Uncle Cupe; see what can be done for this child," and I laid the boy on the bed.

Breath was in the little form, the muscles twitched, the limbs moved convulsively, the hands closed and opened irresponsively. Each muscle seemed to be awaiting its turn to contract and relax. "De chile hab be'n in pain, suah," said Cupe. I knew nothing about how the child

was hurt or how he came to be where I found him. To me the mystery was as to how he could have shrunk in size. When I saw him on the hilltop he stood lank and tall. When I stumbled over his form in the path he had contracted to the little boy before us. Still, these thoughts were of secondary importance now; the child needed help, and I knew nothing about how to give it. Not so Cupe, who quickly opened the waist, directing me to rub the limbs and body with the palms of my hands. He ordered Dinah to make a hot drink, and from a flat bottle that he drew from some secret place he prepared a toddy that in teaspoonful doses was slowly poured into the mouth of the child, who automatically swallowed it. Under the combined influence of the stimulant, the hot tea, and the friction, the little one opened its eyes and regained consciousness. The limbs now ceased contracting, the twitching muscles were quieted, and the eyes opened. Listlessly the boy lay on the bed, rolling his eyes, then I observed Cupe's deportment toward myself, and contrasted therewith the severity of his demeanour when last I came to his cabin. Now he seemed intent on serving me; he spoke respectfully and with great deference; before, he had been domineering and insolent. "Foah yeahs hab pass', Ma'se Samuel, an' at las' yo' hab come back t' Stringtown. An' how does de ole town look t' yo' now?"

I remembered the prediction he had made concerning the change that time might bring in my affections for the village, — a change that I now realised had already to an extent occurred.

"I find many changes in Stringtown," I answered.

"An' am yo' suah de changes am not in yo'selb?" Then, without waiting for me to answer, he added: "How 'bout de gearls? Hab yo' foun' a sweetheaht in de Norf?"

"I have not, Cupe. I told you that I should come back in four years, — see — " I drew from an inner pocket the metal case that he had handed me when, four years since, he pushed me out of the cabin into the night. "I carry this with me, Cupe."

Before he could reply came a knock on the door, and without waiting to be ushered in the intruder lifted the latch and entered.

The Red-Head Boy of Nordman, but no longer a boy. Tall and lank, at least a head taller than myself, he stood before us lithe and supple, red-faced and impudent. I sat by the bed rubbing the forehead of the child, who had, as yet, said not a word. But as his eyes fell upon the face of the intruder his form shrank as if struck by a sudden blow, and with a cry as if of pain he threw his arm about my neck and sobbed convulsively. Then it flashed upon me that the tall form I had seen on the hill was that of Red-Head, and, connecting therewith the present movements of the frightened child, I reasoned that the intruder had been the cause of his suffering. Indignation possessed me. Tearing the clasped arms of the child from my neck, I thrust him upon the bed and faced the new-comer, who stood full a head taller than myself; but this fact gave me no concern. "And you it is," I said, "who delight in frightening helpless children, you who stoop your head when you enter a door?"

He sneered, but did not answer.

"Out of this house!" I pointed to the door, but he made no movement. I sprang toward him, and tried to strike his face; he drew his head back, stepped aside, and I passed him by. Turning suddenly, I sprang again at the intruder, viciously striking at him with my fist; he artfully evaded the blow, and, reaching out his lank

arm, grasped one of my wrists and then the other. The strong lad held my two wrists in one hand, and with his ugly countenance close to my eyes, laughed in my face; then giving me a sudden twirl, he sent me spinning to the farther side of the room. I was frenzied now, and knew not what I did. That leering face and sarcastic laugh were more exasperating than a blow of the fist would have been. It was evident that he could have beaten me to the floor had he cared to do so, and the fact that I had been spared was humiliating. The devil possessed me, and realising that I could not cope with him fist to fist, I sought a weapon, and found it in the form of Cupe's double-barrelled shot-gun that stood in the corner to which he had hurled me. I grasped it, and, with my back in the corner, raised and pointed it toward him, when a form burst from out the door at the back of the room. It was Susie. Had she been a second later I would have pulled the trigger; I shuddered as I dropped the butt of the gun on the floor, for she stood in the line between Red-Head and myself, and I realised how near I had come to firing the weapon as she stepped in the line of sight. Susie, with the eyes of Susie of old, but not exactly the same face, and surely not the form of the wild girl I knew four years ago. A more matured expression of countenance, a womanly figure, had replaced the face and form of the girl, yet had brushed away no charm or grace the girl possessed. She stood motionless before me in the lamplight. A wild rose had been placed in the bosom of her gown, another graced her hair; these, when last I knew her, she would not have worn as she wore them now.

"The gun is loaded," she said. "Is it murder they teach boys in Ohio?" Abashed, I placed the weapon back in the corner while she turned to Cupe. "Uncle

Cupe, you must answer for this! I'll not have such things done in my house!"

"'Deed, Missus, an' I couldn' help de boys come'n, need'ah could I help 'em fight'n."

She turned to Red-Head.

"And you?"

"Did n't fight. Thet feller tried ter fight, but I would n't. He 'd hev shot me too ef yo' hed n't come. Ask Cupe?"

"You need not ask Cupe, ask me," I broke in. "Red-Head tells the truth. I tried to fight and could not. He is stronger than I am, and he knows it. I have been poring over books, he has been running through the fields and woods. I have been sitting before a desk, he has been exercising his muscles all day long. I have been developing my brain, he has been developing his frame and body. I 'm a fool for giving him a chance to show me that I am weak and that he is strong in brute strength. I have acted the dunce in trying to strike him with my fist. It must be brain against muscle hereafter, Susie, and when brain meets muscle, brain always wins. I assure you that I shall not fail again when the time comes for me to strike him down. I shall not fist fight him, though; he can go his way, I shall go mine."

"Then, Mr. Drew, there 'll be no fight, for he promised me long ago not to hurt you."

"So be it, Susie."

"But de sign say dey mus' be de deff ob each uddah," mumbled Cupe. "Et say dat de Red-Head Boy 'll die sudden, an' dat yo' an Susie 'll be de cause; an' dat yo' ll die sudden, an' dat de Red-Head Boy an' Susie 'll be de cause."

"Thar 'll always be two sides ter the path we meet

on," said Red-Head, addressing me. "Yo' keep ter the right, an' I 'll keep ter the right. Thar 's room ter look about without looking at each other, and thar 's room ter whistle, ef we can't keep our mouths shet when we meets on the same path."

"So be it, but mind that you keep to the right," I answered. He left the cabin, without a word of farewell to any one.

The child rested on the bed, asleep. "Susie," I said, "I am ashamed of having fought Red-Head in your home, but he tortured that little child near to death, and I could not help doing it. My temper got the upper hand of my judgment. Will you pardon me?"

"Red-Head is wild and meant no harm, I am sure," she replied. "He speaks softly to me, he shows me many kindnesses; his face is red, his hair is red, but through no fault of his own. He loves the country, he loves the hills, and valleys, the woods and vines and flowers."

"And yet he tortures children, Miss Susie." Never before had I said *Miss* to her, and as I did so now she flushed. I saw the flush — it shaded her face until the hue of the cheek touched that of the petals of the wild sweet briar on her bosom.

"He is uneducated," she replied, "and needs sympathy, not blows. You say that he tortured the child — are you certain that he did? Mind you not the day he stood by my side in the Stringtown school and defended me, a helpless girl? Do you think, Mr. Samuel, that I was not tortured then?"

"Did I not also stand by you, did I not offer him my hand and ask that our past enmity be forgotten, did I not take your part then, Susie?"

"Yes," she said, and her eyes dropped. "Yes, but —"

"But what?"

"You came second."

It was my turn to flush. It was true that I did go second to her side then, seemingly I still stood second. And then my heart thumped, for the first time I knew how deeply I loved this girl, who argued so naturally in behalf of my antagonist.

"Mr. Drew," she continued, "I am nobody but Susie. I have been taught by my guardian, Mr. Wagner, and Professor Drake, and expect to go to college, so that you perceive I am not as wild as I should have been had you not begged me to take the education; still I am 'Susie Nobody,' and I live in the cabin with Cupe and Dinah. You helped me escape absolute ignorance, and for your kindness in guiding me as you did I sincerely thank you. Yes," she continued, "in behalf of two persons do I thank you."

"Who else, Susie?"

"Red-Head. He is not the vicious lad he would have been had I grown up as rude as I might have done."

I bit my lip. "Susie," I said "I hate that name; I wish no thanks for him, nor will I take any."

"I give them on my own account; I do not hate the name," she answered. Then there came over me a sudden impulse to tell her that I loved her. "Susie," I said eagerly, "listen. There was something I wanted to say four years ago. I did not say it then. I must say it now. Susie, I—"

I caught her hand. She did not resist nor withdraw it.

"Missus," broke in Cupe stepping to the girl's side, "de young Ma'se Samuel mus' be tired ob standin' so long. 'Scuse de ole man, but de muddah ob de chile

on de bed 'll worry monstrous much lessen et be toted home. Ef de young ma 'se will break off de conbersashun, Cupe 'll go 'long wid him t' Stringtown t' tote de chile."

The interruption angered me, it was obviously intentional. I recalled how twice before he had prevented me from speaking as I had just been about to speak. But the interruption had been made and Susie had left me; for she turned to the bed, where she gently stroked the child's forehead. "Yes," she said, "Uncle Cupe is right. The little one should be taken to its home." In a few moments the slender form, still asleep, was carried forth, its head resting on the shoulder of the negro. Before leaving the cabin, however, I lingered a second, a second longer than I would have done had the occupant been other than Susie; just a second longer than I might have done had it been any other girl did I hold her hand in mine, and as I dropped it I asked:

"May I come again?"

"Why not?" she answered. "This is Kentucky." She took the wild sweet briar from her hair and handed it to me.

"Thank you, Susie," I said. "May I not also have the other?" and I pointed to the rose in her bosom.

"That is for Red-Head — perhaps," she replied.

CHAPTER L

CUPE'S THREAT

CUPE was old when first I knew him, but he seemed no older and no more decrepit now than then. With the boy over his shoulder he took the lead that night, asking no help, and held it until the village was reached. He was very sullen. Every attempt on my part to engage him in conversation resulted in utter failure; he would not talk. So in communion with myself I followed at his heels.

Before reaching the place where the negro should leave Stringtown we drew near the house of Mr. Wagner. Although it was late, a light shining through the window of the front room indicated that the village clerk had not yet retired.

"Ma'se Sammy," broke in my companion, "Cupe hab a word t' say t' Ma'se Wagnah, an 'll be obleeged ef yo' 'll stop a minit an' heah de conbersashun."

He turned into the little yard, knocked on the door, and together we were ushered into the room, where, as has been related, many years before he had stood with the heavy box of coin and the manuscript of Susie's mother. I was invited to seat myself, and did so, but Cupe remained standing.

"Ma'se Wagnah," he said, "yo' min' de day in de yeah gone by when yo' come t' Cupe's cabin an' tole him how es de Co'ht had made yo' de guardyen ob de little Susie gearl?"

"Yes, Cupe, very well."

"Min' yo' de trouble de gearl yocasioned yo', an' dat de jedge say she could stay wid Cupe till de time come fo' her t' lebe der cabin ob her brack fren's?"

"Yes."

"She wah es full ob fun an' sunshine es a bee tree es ob honey, an' she keered nuffin 'bout no one but de ole brack fo'ks. She hab be'n like honey ebah sense. She wah a spritely gearl, Ma'se Wagnah, a little ting, but now she stan' tall an' supple."

"Go on, Cupe."

"When de little gearl use t' sing, et wah loud like de fiel' lark, an' when she dance', et wah keerless like wid her gahments. But now she doan dance no moah befo' de cabin doah, an' when she sing, et am sof' an' hummin', like de tu'tle dove."

Again he stopped. "Go on," said Mr. Wagner.

"An' when de pert chile use t' gaddah de flowahs in de spring, she bunch 'em in her han' an' den put 'em in a glass ob watah on de table; but now she doan bunch de flowahs no moah, she jes pick one er two wil' roses an' stick 'em in her ha'r er in her busum. Et am a monstrous change, Ma'se Wagnah." Now his voice sunk very low. "An' when de boys roam obah de lan' dey use t' hunt in de woods an' skate an' swim in de pond an' drink out ob de spring down by de milk house. But now dey go by de spring t' stop monstrous offen at de cabin fo' a cup t' git a drink ob watah, er t' ax some fool quistion what doan mean nuffin, er t' act up one way er 'nuddah." He looked at me. "Monstrous little uxcuse et takes t' bring 'em t' de cabin now. Two ob em come t'-night, an' Susie she lingah in her room t' fix up befo' she come out."

"Well, Cupe, what must I do?"

"Et 's time de gearl lef' de cabin; Lawd knows dat Cupe an' Dinah lubs her moah 'n all de worl', but de gearl's place now es wid de white fo'ks. Take her back, Ma'se Wagnah; fo' de good ob de honey chile, take her back!"

"I understand, Cupe. You feel that she has grown beyond your care."

"Et makes de nigger sad t' say et."

"I 'll see Judge Elford and arrange at once for her future. She is a bright girl and should go away to school."

"Min' yo' de readin' ob de papah her muddah wrote?"

"Yes."

"She doan wan' t' go t' school, ner t' go t' any home t' live outen she hab de name she 'titled to."

"That paper carries no evidence that the Court could use to give her the name of her father."

"An' mus' she be 'Nigger Susie' always?"

"She will be only Susie until she marries."

"Yo' know, Ma'se Wagnah, dat ole Ma'se Manley, who die so sudden, wah her fahdah. Yo' know he libed a monstrous good life heah es fo'ks b'lebed, but de kin'-heahted man died s'prisin' sudden. Had he lived longah, he might hab give' de chile de name she 's 'titled to. Et's a pity he died so early."

Mr. Wagner shook his head.

"Ef Susie caint hab her name, de name ob de Manley gearls shall stan' disgrace'," said the earnest negro. "Ef de debbil es t' foller de deah chile, he 'll stick his fingahs into de ha'r ob de uddah gearls too. Ef yo' caint gib Susie her name, Cupe 'll brung shame t' dem."

"Beware, Cupe!" said the now disturbed man. "You intend to do right, but will surely accomplish mischief."

"When Cupe went t' Canerdy, he went by de town what de writin' ob Susie's muddah tole 'bout. He stop t' see de man ole Aunt Sukey knowed, Aunt Sukey who saw Ma'se Manley wid de muddah ob Susie. Cupe paid de lawyers fo' gittin' all de fac's, he hab de swohn papahs, he hab de ev'dence ob de New Yo'k Co'ht es t' Ma'se Manley. Cupe doan mean no mischief, but ef de Susie chile caint git her name, he 'll raise de debbil wid de name ob Manley." He turned to the door, but before going delivered this parting shot: "De New Yo'k jedge said dat in New Yo'k ef a man libed wid a woman in open es ef dey wah married, dey *am* married. De lawyer's common marriage, he called et. Dat ef a chile wah bohn t' dem, et wah his chile an' titled t' his name an' his money too. Dat de deed wah fact ef de proof ob de deed wah suah. An' Cupe hab all de proof in brack writin', even t' de swarin' ob Aunt Sukey an' ob de New Yo'k jedge. Ef Ma'se Manley hab any chile 'titled t' his name, *et am Susie.*"

"For God's sake, keep your mouth shut, Cupe! I shall consult Judge Elford at once about this matter."

"Bettah yo' let no grass grow undah yoah feet, Ma'se Wagnah, fo' Cupe am gittin' monstrous ole, an' doan 'tend t' die an' lebe de gearl widout de name she 's 'titled to."

"Mr. Wagner," I said, "this is all strange to me. I catch part of Cupe's meaning, but much of it is obscure. Still, I take it that Mr. Manley, who died by a paralytic stroke, was the father of Susie."

"Yes, she is his child. He was followed to Kentucky by the girl's mother, who left the baby in charge of Cupe's master, Mr. Hardman, the half-brother of Mr. Manley. Do not, however, speak of the fact you have learned, the secret is to be well kept if Susie is to be

protected. A simple statement of fact cannot serve her interests, while it can bring sorrow and shame to many others."

"Mr. Wagner, when I left Stringtown to go to school you gave me some advice. You told me that when I found the girl I loved, I should tell her so. I am now of age and in a fair way to make a living. I love Susie with all my heart. I cast no blame on her for the shame her father wrought. Upon the contrary, I now despise the name of the man who wronged her, and I love her none the less. I am willing to share my name if she will accept it. Give her a good education, I beg of you, do your duty as her guardian, and look to me to furnish the name she needs. That is —" I hesitated.

"What?"

"If she will share it."

"Cupe knows," I added, and turned to address the old man, but he had silently slipped away; only Mr. Wagner and myself were present. The negro had gone from the room either before or after my declaration was made, I knew not which. He had left us with the expressed threat to "raise the devil with the name of Manley."

CHAPTER LI

THE MAGIC MIRROR

SLEEP did not readily come to my eyes that night, and the snatches of slumber brought little rest. Distressing dreams that seemed to be joined to not less painful periods of waking possessed me. When morning broke I arose fatigued and with swollen eyes. My mother perceived that something weighed upon my mind, and suggested that I might not be well; but I passed the matter lightly. Although painful dreams came to me all that night, I remembered but one incident, wherein occurred a question: "What is the object of life?"

Memory of the scenes of the previous evening and the threat of Cupe concerning the Manleys disturbed me. I feared that he might carry his threat into immediate execution, and I will add that I now felt not only a personal concern, but a legitimate right to interfere. With this thought in mind, I started for his cabin without any well-formulated plan of action. But it was not to meet Susie that I went this time to the home of the dead Corn Bug. I intended to talk with the old negro, and for the once I hoped to find the girl absent.

My object being to discover something further concerning the past life of his charge and to tell Cupe that by reason of my conference with Mr. Wagner, her guardian, I had, to a degree, assumed a personal responsibility concerning her future. I will admit, also, that

I was aggrieved over the manner in which the old slave had treated me on the two occasions in which I had been prevented from telling the girl that my thought was for her, and I now proposed not only to inform him of my intention, but to give him to understand that I should submit to no further impertinence in this direction. "Neither has the old fool," I said to myself, "a right longer to thrust on me his negro superstitions!"

As I reflected in detail over the manner in which he had played upon my childish credulity, and had even made me take part in his incantations, I felt both indignant and humiliated. "I'll have no more of it," I said, and in this mood reached the cabin. No signs of life were to be seen about the place, no dog curled before the step, no Dinah, Cupe nor Susie. I knocked on the door, and imagined that I heard a sound within, but the door remained closed and no voice bade me enter. Then I stepped to the window; it was close curtained. I walked around the dwelling, to find that with one exception the other windows were also draped. The exception was the room in the new addition to the cabin, the room of Susie, but that, too, was unoccupied and the door leading from it into the cabin was closed. A moment I stood there studying with my eyes the scene within. Simple, indeed, were the home surroundings of this girl, and yet in good taste. A picture cut from a magazine, a home-made ornament worked by girlish hands, a few knick-knacks, such as she might cherish, and an assortment of books that astonished me. History, science, art, literature! I knew the works, some of them, others as yet I had not seen. Admiration for the girl had previously possessed me, now I knew that it had not been misplaced.

This was all I saw — with one exception — that of

the pencil drawing of a young man — my own face surely — conspicuous in a rustic frame on the little dresser near the window. Evidently the sketch was by Susie; and slipped into the frame was a rose, a dried wild rose. As I pressed my face to the glass of the little window of the room a sense of shame came over me; my action unmanly. "Forgive me, Susie," I said to myself, "I 'm a churl, a sneak!" and in this mood I passed back to the front door.

I was convinced that the home could not be deserted, for seldom, if ever, did all the occupants of a negro cabin leave the premises unguarded, and I questioned then as to whether from a distance I had not been observed; and naturally I inferred that my unbidden company was distasteful, and that Cupe had taken this means to teach me that my visits were not to be continued. "The impertinent old fanatic," I thought; "to what end may he not carry his superstitions, born of ignorance and bred in arrogance?" I raised an axe handle that stood beside the doorway and beat the heavy oak door as though to splinter it. I made the old house ring, for with each blow I grew angrier and thought meaner things, I who had no right to even question the reason of the action of any occupant of that home. Then, as I rested, the door opened and Cupe stood before me. No smirk on his countenance now, no welcome smile, no courtesy and bow.

"Yo' Stringtown boy from de Norf, ain't dah room nuff outside fo' yo' t' walk?" Then without waiting a reply, he added: "De Susie gearl's not in de cabin." He closed the door in my face.

Never before had I known an old-time negro to do such an act as this; hospitality was born and cultivated in the hearts of the old Southern home slave, and for

Cupe to behave in this manner was unpardonable. I raised the axe handle, and with both hands grasping the shaft, struck such a vicious blow on the door as to benumb my fingers and jar the stick from my grasp. The door, strong as it was, could stand few such attacks as that, and I presume Cupe realised the fact, for once more he threw it open, stepped to one side and awaited my entrance. I lost no time in accepting the opportunity; the negro closed the door immediately, and I observed that he bolted it too, for I heard the draw of the iron bar. I heard it, I say, for although the sun was shining brightly outside there was no ray of light within. Absolute darkness prevailed.

"I tole yo' de Susie gearl am not t' home."

"I came to talk to *you*," I answered, coolly, "not to see Susie."

"De time am not 'pitious an' de mannah ob de come'n am not perlite. Doan yo' see de doah am slow t' open? De sign am bad, I tole yo'."

"Shut up about your signs and incantations. Never let me hear you mention them again. I wish no more of them."

"An' ef yo' wish no moah, why doan yo' keep 'way. Hab Cupe ebah gone t' hunt yo' up an' shove 'em down yoah froat? Doan yo' always come t' Cupe, an' doan yo' start de spell? De twine ob de spell am tangled 'bout de feet ob Cupe an' Dinah and Red-Head an' Susie an' yo'selb. An' yo' am de one who did de act ob de tangle. But Cupe would n't care ef de sweet gearl wah free; de sign twine might be 'bout de necks ob yo' two boys. Did n't yo' start de spell, I axes?"

I felt the justice of the rebuke, but was determined to have my say. "I 'm tired of all this foolishness."

"De doah am b'hin' yo', an' de way am cleah t' de

sunshine; shall Cupe open et an' let yo' out? Yo' hain't got no invite t' stay."

"I tell you I came to talk with *you*."

Then I felt an object touch my knees. "Take de cheer an' do yoah talkin' moah comf'ble."

I sought the back of the chair with my hand, found it and seated myself. "Cupe, why don't you light up your room? raise the curtain."

"Yo' come t' talk 'bout fool signs, Cupe hab de conbersashun in him eah; go on wid de talk, fo' de eah doan need no light."

I felt somewhat disturbed. The absence of the women, the mysterious movements of the negro, his well-known fanaticism and his methods were not calculated to enliven me; besides, this absolute darkness, when it should have been light, was depressing.

"Cupe, since I came to this cabin as a child I have been imposed upon more than once by your superstitions. You led me to expect to fight Red-Head, and the mental impression you made on my young mind induced me to hate him. I presume that you accomplished the same end with Red-Head. You led the unsuspecting girl Susie to look forward to trouble that was coming between us two boys, and she, too, became involved in your silly signs. You must stop this nonsense now."

"An' yo' doan b'lebe in de sign?"

"No."

"When de chicken cock crow at midnight, am et a sign dat mahn'n 'll come?"

"No."

"Do yo' ebah know a mahn'n not t' come ahftah de crowin' ob de chicken?"

"You old fool."

"Yo' say yo' doan b'lebe in signs?"

"No."

"Yo' b'lebe in de alm'nac?"

"Yes."

"De 'clipses, de da'k an' de light ob de moon, 'cordin' t' de alm'nac, am right?"

"Yes; they are predicted by calculation."

"Yo' b'lebe what yo' see written in de alm'nac book?"

"Yes."

"Cupe 'll ask yo' t' read a page fo' t' let him see ef de Susie gearl kin read es apt es she might."

He lighted a candle, and took from near the fireplace a Farmers' and Mechanics' Almanac; clumsily fingering the pages, he thrust the open book before my face. "Read de wo'ds ob de alm'nac an' tole me what de gem'n what write et say. He am not bery p'lite in de pictah, an' he seems t' be pow'ful much hurt jes below de ribs." I glanced at the page and over the well-known illustration read, "Signs of the Zodiac."

Cupe chuckled. "An' yoah book ob fac's am a sign book. Bettah yo' say nuffin moah 'bout Cupe. De book say de moon 'll change, an' suah de sign yo' read in de book am good, fo' de moon *do* change. Et say de 'clipses 'll come, an' de sign am good, fo' dey do come. What yo' see in de book am good, an' Cupe sahtify t' de fac', but what Cupe kin see wid his eyes an' heah wid his eahs am jes es good es alm'nac signs." Suddenly changing the subject of the discussion, he asked:

"Doan yo' meet de Red-Head Boy es Cupe p'dicted?"

"Yes."

"Doan yo' two boys fight?"

"Yes."

"Doan de Susie gearl come betwixt yo'?"

"Yes, but —"

But without heeding me the negro added: "An' did n't Cupe p'dict de come'n ob dem all?"

"You guessed some things, I will admit."

"An' so does de alm'nac book guess some tings. But Cupe doan guess. He sees 'em all, he knows moah'n he tells, an' he kin tell moah 'bout yo' dan yo' tells too."

"Tell me something I know that has happened and not been told."

"Yo' stood in de city by de stone wall wid de carpet-bag at yoah feet an' met de long-haired man. Yo' went wid him t' de play-house. Yo' los' yoah money, an' den yo' go an' stan' on de bridge lookin' down in de watah, an' yo' come monstrous neah jurnyin' down into de ribbah. But yo' could n't jump, fo' de end ob de spell wah not den. Yo' did n't tole no man 'bout de 'sperience yo' meet in de big city, an' yo' doan 'tend t' tole no man, ner yo' doan wan' Cupe t' tole no man."

"You old devil," I said indignantly, "how did you find out these things?"

"I read 'em in de glass, I see 'em wid my eyes, I heah de conbersashun wid my eahs es easy es I talk t' yo' now. Yo' look in de alm'nac book fo' de sign, an' yo' doan git much but moon an' 'clipses. Cupe see de movin' ob de past an' de come'n ob de future, an' yo' call dem fool signs. He wah readin' de future when yo' knock so loud on de doah."

"You 're an old liar, Cupe. Some man told you these things about me."

"An' yo' wan' t' see wid yoah eyes?"

"I dare you to show me the things you claim to see."

"Memberlec' dat Cupe doan ax yo' on. Yo' am de feller what ax de quistion."

"I dare you to show me the manner in which you read the sign."

"Dah am moah 'n one way, but one 's nuff fo' yo'. Sit still an' doan move, yo' sign chile, sit still, an' yo 'll see de passin' ob de past an' de come'n ob de nex' spell."

He lighted a candle and from some unseen receptacle produced a black object like a mirror, about twelve inches in length and nine inches in diameter. It was concave, and black as pitch. This he placed in my hands, explaining that I must look into its concave surface. As my fingers touched the curious object, every point of which was black as asphaltum, a curious sensation ran over my body, a strange tremble that seemed to be carried into my frame from out my finger-tips. The dim glimmer of the candle, that lighted the room but little, and the thing I touched but could see not at all, the solemn voice of the negro, the air of mystery with which he moved and spoke, following the remarkable manner in which he had outlined the experiences I met in Cincinnati, and that I supposed were locked securely in my own breast, unnerved me and my hands trembled.

"What is this thing, and where did you get it?" I asked.

"Et am de sign-glass, an' I got et from de man who doan make no alm'nacs. Cupe hab trabelled Norf, an' hab trabelled Souf, an' hab sot monstrous close t' men who hab be'n out in de night an' in de sunshine wha' de summer am all de yeah long. Yo 'll see moah in dat glass dan yo' ebah read in any book, an' when yo' git fru, yo 'll not hab t' ax Cupe t' tole yo' de nex' news what 's come'n, an' yo' won't be consahned in wha' Cupe got de glass need'h. Look down an' read — read de glass."

I lowered my eyes, and as I did so the negro blew out the flame of the candle; again I was in absolute darkness, gazing at or toward an object in itself black even in daylight. "Cupe, this is nonsense; light up the candle, open the door!" I said. But still I gazed into the mirror's depths, for strange movements began to play in the air near where I felt the surface of the thing should be, and then an uncouth object shot from out one side of the mirror and assumed the shape of an ugly human face.

"Look in de sign-glass, chile, an' talk when de spell am obah," but no reason had the negro to make this charge now, for as suddenly as it appeared did the face vanish, and I now gazed in fascination down into its depths, yes, through it into light beyond. This is what I saw.

The motion of the air at first was similar to a thick mist blown back and forth in the night before an illuminated object that could just be distinguished deep down in the bottomless distance. Then came a gyrating movement that swept the vapours into a spiral which revolved as does an eddy of water, sucking the vapours into a vortex centre, which seemed to pass down into the increasing brightness beyond. As the vapours disappeared into the eddy, the light rapidly brightened, and soon I sat looking into a sunshine scene in which no object appeared, nothing but a curious light, soft, pleasant, soothing. Then came a shadow, and as by magic a scene uplifted before my eyes, a scene of the past in which I had taken part, and all the incidents of that night of terror in which as a child I first ran to this cabin, followed each other in rapid succession. I saw minutely every phase of that scene, from the reading by Cupe of the sign in the ashes to the vision of the little girl sitting at the table.

Next came a blank in which mists whirled again, and then appeared the scene in the grocery, where, that night in 1863, stood Parson Jones confronting the picturesque Colonel Luridson. I heard the storm again; the sleet and wind of New Year, 1864, beat upon my ears, the movements of the men about that stove and their conversation were again a part of my life, and I saw myself, too, sitting in the circle even until the climax came and the hands of the parson leaped out and grasped the throat of Luridson. I saw and heard as if I were an observer, and then, as for the second time, I gazed at a scene in which an actor, I sat now an observer. I cried aloud and the scene changed.

Next came, one by one, the principal incidents I have recorded in this history of my life and which I need not again relate. The quarrel with Red-Head in the valley, the farewell to Stringtown, the pathetic ride on the old, rocking stage, the subsequent experiences in Cincinnati, touched upon by Cupe and which I had never described to any one, the life in college, the return to Stringtown, the recent incidents, and at last I was led to the present moment, and saw myself sitting in my chair gazing into the magic mirror. Yes, I sat in the cabin of Cupe holding that occult glass, into whose depths I was peering and, remarkable statement, I was surely looking at myself. A feeling of awe came over me, a desire to drop the glass, and yet I could not. Spellbound my eyes followed the young man (myself), who next handed the glass to the negro by his side and passed out of the cabin. He walked slowly, with bowed head, seemingly in deep meditation; but once did he stoop (and then I could not catch the object he picked up) until, raising his eyes, a girl appeared before him. The two spoke, then I saw him take her hand and plead for something,

but in words I could not catch, for the voices were very low. She stood with drooping eyes and seemed to withstand the earnest solicitation, for she shook her head, and at last they separated, he moving slowly away toward Stringtown, she toward the cabin. And as she passed along I observed that her eyes were filled with tears.

I next followed the lad until I entered the village. I saw the door of my home open, and then I stood by my mother's side pleading for something in words that again I could not catch. Eye seemed to be the more acute of the senses now, for while I heard an indistinct hum of voices ear could not catch the words. Earnestly I pleaded with my mother, and as I did so, I who saw but could not hear, grew deeply interested in the nature of the conversation, for I felt that it concerned my recent interview with the girl. Involuntarily I moved the mirror nearer my face, and then, instantly, darkness enveloped me. I sat in absolute darkness back in the cabin; the charm was broken.

I do not know how the negro learned that I had broken the spell — possibly I made some noise; at any rate, he lighted the candle, took the "sign-glass" from my hands, opened the door, drew up the curtains, and then said: "An' did yo' see de story ob yoah life?"

"I had a curious experience, surely," I replied, in a respectful tone I should not have used preceding the "experience."

"An' did yo' reach de cabin?"

"Yes."

"An' did yo' go pas' de cabin an' see de tings what 's come'n?"

"I saw myself walk away from this cabin, if you call that 'tings what 's come'n'."

"Yo' did n't git t' de end ob yoah trabels, yo' did n't

see de cole face an' de crossed han's, yo' did n't see de endin' ob de spell twixt yo' an' Red-Head ?"

"No."

'Yo' did n't fin' de meanin' ob de sign what say dat Susie 'll be gone from the worl' an' walkin' still ?"

"No ; I moved the mirror and the scene disappeared."

"Et am monstrous strange, de endin' ob de spell fo' Susie. Cupe hab read de endin' ob Red-Head an' ob yo', too, but he caint git no sense out ob de endin' ob Susie. Gone out ob de worl' an' yet in et, de spell say. She wah surely walkin' ahftah de sign p'dict she wah gone from de worl'. De pure white face wah sweet es an angel, she wah in ole Kaintuck suah, she wah movin' an' talkin', yit de sign say she wah gone from de worl'. Et am an awful ting t' Cupe t' not see de cleah endin' ob de spell fo' Susie." Then he turned to me and spoke kindly : "Chile, Cupe doan mean no ha'am t' yo', he hain't said no disrespec'. Yo' hab slandered de sign what doan come out ob de alm'nac book, but befo' yo' speak at random ag'in yo'll see dat de sign-glass kin show what de alm'nac book caint. Yo' hab seed de tings what yo' know am wonct be'n, an' yo' hab seed de come'n steps, an' yo' caint help but walk in de way yo' saw de signs movin'." He pointed to the door. "De come'n ob de sign am axin' yo' t' go on."

I left the cabin, and passed down a path that led to Stringtown.

CHAPTER LII

MY SECOND JOURNEY OVER A PATH I NEVER YET HAD TROD

MANY and varied were the emotions that passed through my mind as I left that door. What strange mirror had Cupe in his possession that could lead me to imagine that I was looking at my past movements? "Pshaw!" I said aloud, "the negro has made a fool of me."

But there came then to mind the curious manner in which he touched upon my movements in Cincinnati. Slowly I passed along, stopping often to think over the incidents related, and then it occurred to me that I had passed that way before. Yes, I saw that I was simply retracing a path over which I had recently walked; and yet I knew that I came to the cabin by another path, and that not for four years had I been there previously. Objects by the wayside were familiar, and as I passed along I anticipated those that would next appear.

I stooped over and picked a modest little blue blossom that peeped from a tuft of grass by the path — I had picked that same flower before from beside that exact clump of grass — and as I pinned it to my lapel I appreciated that once before I had pinned that identical flower to the lapel as now I did it.

"Strange," I thought to myself, "I meet detail experiences now that I did not notice when reading the mirror, but which I perceive, now that I am reminded

of them, are surely repetitions of past incidents." And then I caught the fact that the mirror seemingly opened conspicuous phases of life and held them before my gaze, but left the impress of others to be revived on my intellect. These reflections sifted through my mind as I passed for the second time along that narrow path, the path I had recently seen myself following, and then my thoughts turned towards Susie and unbidden came to my lips the lines of a favourite song of that day :

'T was down in the meadows, the violets were blooming
And the springtime grass was fresh and green.
And the birds by the brooklet their sweet songs were singing,
When I first met my darling, Daisy Deane.

"Don't sing the song out, please."

I had turned a sharp angle in the thickest banked hollow and Susie stood before me. She was slowly walking toward her home; her downcast eyes were shaded by her sunbonnet, and her gaze rested on the path before her. She raised her eyes and fixed them on my own, this child woman, whose youthful face, notwithstanding her childishness, was womanly in expression. "I have been to the cabin, Miss Susie," I said; "it may be my last visit, for soon I start North to prepare for the task I have assumed; but you know that you said I might come again."

Not heeding my words, the girl extended her hand; I took it in my own, and held it too long, I fear, before releasing it. "Mr. Drew," she said, "you must come no more to my home." I began to protest, but she interrupted. "Do not deny me this favour; I am in earnest, deeply in earnest. Come no more to my cabin, avoid Cupe, avoid Dinah" — she hesitated an instant, just enough to show that she had hesitated — and continued : "Bid me good-bye forever."

"Susie, this is cruel. What have I done to provoke you? Did I not ask you to forgive my rudeness the night I met Red-Head in your home?"

"I bear you no ill will for that," she answered. "I was partly at fault, and I am sorry for my last remark; I did not give the rose to Red-Head."

"I already know that, and yet I thank you for telling me. But why did you tantalise me, what object had you in declining to give me the second rose, why did you irritate me by leading me to believe that you intended to give it to him?"

"Am I not a girl? Why should you take that so seriously? Had you the discernment of a girl you would not have asked me to give you the second rose; it was foolish in me to proffer you, unasked, the first one."

"Let the matter drop. I have one of the roses and Red-Head did not get the other. Susie, twice only in four years have I called at your home to meet you; at neither time did I get the chance to tell you why I made the visit."

"Nor must you tell me now."

"Susie, I'll not leave you this time without having my say. I —"

"Please, Mr. Drew," she interrupted, "first listen to me."

"Go on, Miss Susie. But when you have finished I shall tell you what twice before I have tried to say."

Not heeding me, she continued: "I am a lonely girl reared by the negroes. I have been wild and careless, but am so no longer. If I have a father, he has no child in me. My mother was shot during the war, I cannot remember her. Youth has been in my case a strange story of negro lore and superstition, of human neglect and inhuman loneliness. I remember less of

pleasure than of trouble, less of kindness than of rudeness. I am prematurely old in some things, but this is not my fault; no other girl in Stringtown has had cause to think as have I of things that crush the joys of childhood. No girl companion ever crosses the threshold of my home, nor do I meet any in their own. Why should I be young? Mr. Drew, to think as I have done since I was taught my place among people is to learn more of some things than many who are much older know. To feel the undeserved touch of shame is to realise what shame really is. To meet the shrinking eye and the withdrawn hand, to hear the sneer of the heartless tongue, brings care and sorrow that brushes youth away early. I am alone with Cupe and Dinah; nearly as old in feeling, I sometimes imagine, as are they. You have been kind in thinking of me. I don't know why you act as you do, but you are indiscreet and have no right to injure yourself and wrong me by persisting in your visits. I wish to be left alone; and while I feel deeply grateful for your good will, I cannot permit any further attention."

"Susie, you wrong both of us by this idle talk. You are a girl, and yet you take life as seriously as if you were a full-grown woman."

"Cares and thoughts that are bred of snubs and sneers have cut off my girlhood. I have already told you that. I have no mother to take a mother's part for me; I must be a woman. I know some things too well to require information from others concerning them, and one of these is that you have brought me much trouble."

"I, Susie, I?"

"Yes, you. It was you who asked that I might be educated, who led me to receive the instruction that

enabled me to understand my position in life. Were I the wild ignorant girl I should have been but for your interference, I might now be happy with the negroes, knowing nothing concerning the world nor of what others have and are in the world, nor yet of what I am myself. You did a wrong, Mr. Drew, in thus showing me what other girls are, and in picturing my utter disgrace and absolute helplessness. I could not have felt these things had you left me in ignorance."

"Miss —"

"Nothing but Susie, if you please," she interjected, observing that I hesitated.

"Susie," I continued, "these things that you brood over concern me not at all and do you no harm. You magnify your misfortunes; you misjudge men and women; you wrong your friends and hurt those who would be your friends. I speak from my heart, Susie; you wrong me too, and to prove it I shall tell you now what I came twice before to say. I —"

"Stop," she cried; "before you finish the words you intend to speak, I would ask — have you spoken to your mother?"

Surely the girl knew what I intended to ask. Her manner showed that, and now my heart leaped, for her tone was not that of one offended or unfriendly, but rather of earnest questioning.

"No; but she will make no objection to —"

"First ask her, and if she makes no objection, you may come to the cabin and finish the question you would ask of me. Promise to do this," she pleaded.

"You have my promise, Susie, but you need have no question concerning the result. I shall return to-night — yes, this very afternoon. I 'll tell you then that which I have started three times to say."

She shook her head. "You will not come back to-night, neither will it be to-morrow nor yet the next day. No, never. You may meet me by accident, I may come to you — Cupe says that I'll kneel on the floor and with tears in my eyes beg justice of you — but whether this is true or not you will never come to me with these words on your lips again."

"You will never come again," she continued; "others have turned away, none are left but Red-Head and my guardian — none, and you, too, will come no more. Farewell." Her hand trembled as I again clasped it, and now its touch was cold. Her eyes met mine, and I saw that they were filled with tears. "May I have the flower you wear in your lapel?" she asked. "Why do you ask that of me?" I said. "Take it, though, and if ever you need a friend, one who will grant your every wish, you who claim that you have no friends, need but show that flower to me. *Whatever it may be, and wherever I may be, you have but to ask.*"

"Thank you, and farewell, Mr. Drew. You have been kind to me, but very thoughtless I think about yourself. I forgive you the wrong you have done in the unsought education that shows me my position. But I wish that it could be forever lost."

I stood in silence. She turned and walked up the path the way I came, vanishing around the clump of hazel, and then I turned toward Stringtown. Now came again to my mind the vision that the mirror pictured; all I had seen therein had been repeated, verified, and in addition my ear had now heard the conversation that the mirror failed to give.

CHAPTER LIII

"NEVER, UNLESS DUTY CALLS, SHALL I RETURN TO STRINGTOWN"

MY patient, loving mother, whose life had been a constant sacrifice for her son, once a source of deep humiliation, now an object of pride, sat that afternoon in the little room sewing by the centre table. I entered with quick step, with happy heart, with no misgivings concerning the result of my mission. The fulfilment of my desires had been to her a source of great pleasure heretofore; she had never denied me a request that was right and that could be conceded.

"Mother" — I said, seating myself beside her chair, — "I am now twenty-one years of age. I have a good position, where advancement is certain, and where I shall win yet higher honours. In order to prepare for the course I have mapped out I must leave Stringtown in a few days. Before going, however, I wish to speak with you concerning a very important subject."

"Go on, my son," said she, laying aside her sewing.

"Mother, you know that I have been offered an assistant position in chemistry. I hope to make a better home than this for you in a few years, and to give you a life of peace and rest. For me you have worked your fingers sore, have slaved since I can remember."

"You must first make a happy home for yourself, my boy; that should be your object, one to which, in case of necessity, your old mother may come and end her

days. But for a time at least I shall not think of leaving Stringtown. Look forward to a home of your own; seek no higher ambition. You will some day meet one you can ask to go with you to the end of your journey, and be with you, to love you and be loved. This I hope to see accomplished before I die."

"I have met her already, mother," I said in elation, "and I came to ask your permission to speak to her, to get your blessing on both of us and your favour for her."

"So soon, my son! Are you not hasty? I thought and spoke of the future. I had no suspicion of this love; you did not tell me that you had found a sweetheart in the North."

"Nor have I."

"And yet you keep no company with Stringtown girls."

"No, and shall not. I am in love, but my love is neither in the North nor in Stringtown. I love the girl who lives with Cupe and Dinah, the girl called Susie."

My mother dropped the garment she held in her hand.

"You do not mean it, Sammy."

"Mother, I speak the truth. I love Susie better than life."

"Susie who?"

The question was cruel. My mother, she to whom I came in absolute confidence, she, too, emphasised the word *who*, and as unmercifully as any Stringtown girl had done. I stood up in anger, indignation for the first time toward my mother entered my heart.

"'Who?' why, Susie, only Susie, and I who am concerned most of any care for nothing else. Some day she will be Susie Drew, and then I'll beat the face of the man who says 'Susie *who?*' to me, and I'll teach

the —" but my mother had spoken the word "*who*" — I did not finish the remark.

"My son, you must listen to your mother. Have you asked the girl to marry you?"

"No."

"She is an adventuress, — yes, worse, a girl without character, one who has no friends among respectable people, who is shunned by the village girls and neglected by the village boys. Her history is one of shameful birth, if report speaks true; to be disgraced by birth is a lasting stigma unforgivable. Subsequent environment has added nothing to remove the stain, — she has been negro-bred. Listen to your mother, my dear boy, see her no more."

"And this from you, mother!"

"Yes; I am old enough to speak advisedly. You are young, a pretty face excites what you think is love, — it is puppy love, my child, and when the face is out of sight will soon fade away. You cannot realise that to marry that girl will be to blast your life and disgrace your mother. How did this artful adventuress manage to entangle you? She's a dangerous girl. Surely the villagers do not know of the affair, or else I would long since have known of it."

"Mother, I cannot take this kindly, even from you. I must have my say. I am no longer a child. Susie is as pure and holy as was ever girl or woman. She has been unfortunate in birth; she does not know her father, much to his shame, and not to her disgrace; her life has been a dreary, lonely one, and her companions have been her books and the negroes. From the one she has profited, the others have served her well, — be it said to their credit and to Stringtown's discredit. You say that I am possessed by 'puppy love,' that when the face is gone

the love will fade away. That is not so. You say that to marry Susie will be to blast my life, that my marriage to the girl will disgrace you, my mother. And why? Because of an unwritten law that scoundrels make, and society follows, that reaches even such as you, and does not credit you, who seek to save discredit from your son. You called that girl an adventuress, but the facts are that your son made the advances. I sought her, but she gave no encouragement. I forced my attentions on her, and she met them coldly. She has been wronged by you. I must say this, even to you, mother."

I sank on my knees by her side, and as if I were again a child, buried my face in her lap, while tears, born of humiliation, indignation, disappointment, and sorrow, gushed from my eyes. She gently stroked my hair, back and forth, as she had been wont to do when I was a child.

"Heed the words of your mother, Sammy. Disgrace that falls upon and lingers over the name of woman can never be brushed away."

"But she has done nothing wrong, this forlorn girl; she is helpless."

"The world makes no allowance for the fact that the girl is not at fault; she is unfortunate, and must accept the odium that rests upon her name. Does not the Bible say words to the effect that the sins of the parents shall be visited upon the children?"

"Don't make me hate the Bible, mother!"

"My child!"

"Listen now to me, mother." I arose and seated myself on my chair, calm, composed. "I shall leave Stringtown to-night — yes, this very night. My vacation scarce commenced, ends to-night. Never, unless duty calls, shall I return to Stringtown, unless you give

me permission to go to Susie as a suitor, free to ask her to be my wife, or unless Susie permits me to visit her. I have made a fool of myself in my usual way, — that of thoughtlessly acceding to a request that I should never have granted. I intended to ask Susie to be my wife to-day, and then to ask your blessing; but thinking only that you would approve of it, I agreed to ask your consent first."

"Thank the Lord, my child, that some far-seeing friend, one who comprehends the effect of social disgrace, has prevented this terrible mistake. Whoever he or she may be, my heartfelt thanks and gratitude go out to him or her. Had you not made this promise, you might now have been in the toils of the adventuress."

"You have blessed the girl; for this I thank you," I said, but added no further word of explanation. Then I arose and strode back and forth across the little room. Suddenly I turned to my mother:

"I shall take the bus this evening for my new position. My trunk is scarce unpacked. I shall leave Stringtown *now*."

CHAPTER LIV

FAREWELL TO SUSIE

I STEPPED into my room and wrote a note which, hastily sealing, I addressed with the simple word "*Susie.*" What else could I have used, what else but "Susie *Who?*" Then I called a boy from the street and paid him liberally to deliver it immediately. The letter was permissible, for although I agreed not to call on her, I had not promised the girl that I would not write.

Love letters, I have heard, are not as a rule very edifying to others. This, my first, last and only love letter, I shall, however, venture to reproduce.

DEAR SUSIE: You say that I wronged you in inducing Mr. Wagner to educate you. To this I take no exception. You think that you have been led by that education to see yourself disgraced. With this I take issue. By reason of it you perceive better the sins of men and women who make social laws to protect the strong and oppress the weak, to elevate the villain of a father and damn his innocent child. I shall leave Stringtown this afternoon on the evening bus, and by your command I go without calling on you. You induced me to promise to leave to my mother a question that concerned myself more than all others, you bound me to an oath that I cannot break, but which your discriminative eye foresaw would lead to my defeat and to my present distress. For this I blame you. Let, then, my charge against you balance the one you hold against me. And now to the future. I leave Stringtown anxious to complete the sentence which, incomplete as it is, I shall hold sacred until my

mother gives me the privilege of returning to your side or until you permit me to come and finish it. I obey my mother because you command it, otherwise I should firmly insist on using my own good will; you know what that will is. I solemnly swear that it shall never change while life lasts.

Yours,

SAMUEL DREW.

Then I turned to help my mother pack the trunk that a few days previously came with me from the North. In a short time it was strapped and rolled to the gate. I bade her farewell, and at last as the shadows lengthened started for the bus which, delayed by an accident, late that afternoon rolled into Stringtown. As I mounted the box to the familiar seat beside the driver, old Cupe shuffled to my side and thrust a letter into my hand, then left me without a word. The four-in-hand rolled off, stopped a moment before my mother's door, where my trunk was thrown aboard, and then rumbled on again. Once more I saw mother standing with handkerchief to her eyes, but this time I felt that had she cared more for her boy and less for the traditions of society, joy might both have brightened her face and gladdened my heart.

Then I opened the letter that lies now before my eyes:

Mr. Samuel Drew.

DEAR FRIEND: In reply to your letter, it is my opinion that you wrong your mother. She should not be blamed for loving you too well to permit you to disgrace yourself. I am unfortunate, through no act of my own, it is true, but yet unfortunate, and I know it. Were I in the place of one of your Stringtown girls, and she in mine, I would probably shun her as now I am shunned. The mark of shame rests over my life. The social rules that govern people cannot be changed, nor should they;

for to relax social vigilance would be to open the door to crime and immorality. I have racked my brain over the matter, have read and studied social science, and although I am young, the subject has disturbed me for years. You have my thanks for your good will — this I have told you before. You will merit them the more if you look to your own future, and forget the past so far as it concerns me. Undo your hasty, thoughtless pledges, strive to excel in good deeds and leave the negro-bred girl Susie to pass in peace wherever chance or duty leads her. Mr. Drew, you are far above me. Of all the persons I know, Red-Head alone stands in actual sympathy and on an equality with such as I. Let, then, my life be spent in sympathy with those to whom such as I must be in touch, let the unended sentence you have three times commenced rest unfinished forever.

Very truly yours,

Susie.

While I was reading the letter the driver stopped the team in order to arrange a defective piece of harness on one of the horses, and as I raised my eyes I saw Red-Head beneath a tree by the right-hand side of the road. Tall, erect, lithe, he stood not more than twenty feet from me, gazing directly into my face. A sensation akin to pity for the young man came over me, a kindly feeling for one neglected as he had been. I raised my hat politely and bowed. But he, without any recognition whatever, gazed stoically into my face and whistled. Then the devil touched my heart, and in a low tone, that was the more effective because of this fact, I asked: "Why do you not go back to the mountains; cannot you handle a Springfield rifle yet?" He made no reply, and I continued: "How about that mountain feud? Holcomb will get tired of waiting for you to grow bigger."

Indifferent to the taunt, he stood motionless. The coach now moved on, and as it did so I spoke the

meanest words I ever used: "You 're very willing to talk fight, you who dare not go back to the mountains where lives old man Holcomb." But even this brought no reply; like a statue he remained in the shadow, watching the stage on which I sat, watching it until around a bend in the pike the lumbering vehicle disappeared from his view.

CHAPTER LV

PROFESSOR SAMUEL DREW

INTO the University I stepped with embittered heart and rebellious spirit. Ambition still possessed me, but not such ambition as should have animated a poor widow's son with my prospects. The professor whom I was to assist greeted me kindly, and I found him to be a charming old man, engrossed in the love of his science. He took pains to introduce me at once to those of his colleagues who still lingered about the University, although most members of the faculty were now enjoying their vacation elsewhere.

"You please me very much, Mr. Drew," he remarked during our first audience. "Not many young men would sacrifice their summer vacation as you have done in order to acquaint themselves with the exacting details of a new work. It speaks well for your future, for while genius is often useful and sometimes leads to fortune, the men who make successes of their lives are those who work while others rest. Surely it must have required more than a little self-sacrifice on your part to leave your mother, your friends, your —" he glanced slyly out of the corners of his eyes — "your sweetheart!"

"Let it pass," I answered; "forget that I came before duty called me. I shall do my utmost to credit myself in the future."

Many were the compliments the old professor gave me, for my daily application pleased him, and when the

president returned from abroad, he praised me in my very presence, informing him that I had sacrificed my vacation and devoted my entire time to the University work, "and," he added, "credit for the changed condition of the laboratory and chemical department is due to his personal efforts." But I thought of the girl who once stood before me in the path near Stringtown, and the events that had followed the request she made; of the bitter spirit and heart madness with which I came to this work; and realising how unearned was the praise bestowed upon me, demurred.

"You are mistaken," I said. "I deserve no credit."

"Tut, tut, boy! and to whom is the credit due?"

The answer and the question were alike unexpected; the eyes of both were quizzing me.

"To Susie."

The old man chuckled, and slyly poked the president in the ribs with his thumb, a thing I did not expect to see a dignified professor do to a great president.

"And who is Susie?"

That hateful term again, "Who is Susie?" Could I never get away from it? But regard for the men led me to be decorous now and to suppress my indignation.

"She 's a girl, and lives near Stringtown."

Again the professor chuckled. "Let the credit be with Susie;" then he added: "Let us hope the time may come when we may meet Susie in the University."

"She 'll never come to this University while I am here, and never again shall I visit Stringtown while she is there. We are nothing to each other, for she will not have it so. I beg you, though, to give Susie the credit for my early appearance, and pass the matter forever."

"Pardon us, Mr. Drew; we unintentionally touched

a tender spot; pardon our thoughtless familiarity," said the professor. They passed from the room and I turned sadly to my work. But I could not help thinking that the old professor reminded me very much of Judge Elford, and I could but wonder how the dignified president of a University could be punched in the ribs without being offended. And so I began my new found task which grew more enticing as the seasons passed, during which period, true to my word, I refrained from visiting Stringtown.

The death of good old Professor Longman, who died after a short illness, left me, in the middle of a subsequent session, in full charge of the classes, and faithful attention to my duties, together with the commendations he had bestowed upon me during his life, led the trustees subsequently to appoint me to the vacancy, to which knowing well my youthfulness, I did not presume to aspire. But it seems that the president had declared in my favour and was not afraid of young blood. He appeared personally before the Board and expressed himself to that effect, which left them no reason, had they been so inclined, to seek elsewhere for a successor. Hence the Announcement of the University on the Hill, following the death of Professor Longman, bore my name as Professor of Chemistry, and thus it was that I became unexpectedly honoured; but of this I need say nothing further, for I was now a man, and knew that hard work had earned that position for me.

The middle of the session following my appointment found me one day sitting in my private office reading a letter from my mother. It contained the usual loving messages, and the neighbourhood gossip was also brought to date. But its ending, which I reproduce, cast a shadow over my heart:

Mr. Nordman, the old gentleman who lived beside the pike south of Stringtown, died suddenly this morning. He had been very feeble, but otherwise seemed to enjoy good health. He was attacked with a misery in his stomach immediately after breakfast, and died soon after the doctor reached his bedside.

I held the letter listlessly in my hand and mused: "Now he, too, will lie in the little graveyard behind the house." And musing thus, the single shaft in the family graveyard appeared before my mind-sight; that shaft to the south of which rested his child, the Southern soldier, and to the north of which lay the Union son. And next came to mind and sight the form of Mr. Nordman, as the day before I left Stringtown, he led me to the spot where rested his two boys. And then recurred the words of advice he gave me as we parted: "The grass grows no greener, the violets bloom no earlier, over the one than over the other. 'The wah is over, Sammy.'"

"The war is surely over now for you, Mr. Nordman," I sadly said to myself, and then turned to my work.

CHAPTER LVI

THE STRINGTOWN POISON CASE

THE lectures passed day by day, the laboratory classes were drilled, as usual, and yet that sentence of Mr. Nordman rang in my ears and came unbidden to mind when no cause seemed to excite it.

The figure of Mr. Nordman seemed constantly before my eyes, his words rang ever in my ears, and try as I might I could not beat them out.

"What had Mr. Nordman to do with me, that the announcement of his death should thus concern me?" I asked this question, and then argued that this domination of my mind by his form and voice was simply the result of habit, a fit of melancholy permitted it, a sour stomach, perhaps, induced it. Surely Mr. Nordman's death was of no greater concern to me than was that of many other men in Stringtown who had died since I knew the village. Then came a second letter from Stringtown, a letter in a strange hand, but which bore the well-known Stringtown postmark. It was written by the attorney who had prosecuted old negro Cupe in the trial wherein he was freed by Right of Clergy, and I learned from it that the writer was again prosecuting attorney of Stringtown County. Let me give the letter in full:

My dear Professor Drew: As prosecuting attorney of Stringtown County, it becomes my duty to engage an expert chemist in behalf of the Commonwealth. Can I secure your

services? The case is one of importance, and knowing you as I do, and knowing, too, the esteem in which you are held by the people of our county, I hope that you will consent to serve us. We wish an analysis made of the contents of the stomach of Mr. Nordman, whom you probably remember. I will add that I guarantee your fee, which will be paid by the administrator of the estate. Please let me hear from you at once.

Sincerely yours,

Z. B. Putten.

I turned to my desk and at once accepted the offer, giving explicit directions concerning the manner in which the suspected parts were to be secured, sealed in the presence of witnesses and then expressed to my address. The letter posted, I turned to my books and sought the sections devoted to the detection of poisons, after which I sat in meditation. Do not "coming events cast their shadows before?" In what other way than on this hypothesis can I account for the persistence with which I had been pursued by the form and words of Mr. Nordman? Then came the thought that in the course of events duty would demand that I go once more to Stringtown. Duty calls, and while away in her behest I may chance to meet Susie.

Then I mentally thanked Mr. Putten, the prosecuting attorney, for his confidence in my ability, and did not feel unkindly toward Mr. Nordman for the part he had taken in my personal affairs.

But when the express package reached me, that wooden-bound box securely encased in hoop iron, a sensation which I cannot correctly voice in writing came over me. And when my assistant opened the box and removed from it the large glass fruit jar closely wrapped in stiff manilla paper and sealed with red wax bearing the official stamp of the sheriff, I felt a sinking of the heart;

for I was not accustomed to handle such fruit as that jar contained. But a duty is a duty, I thought, and a gem from the Jewish Talmud came to my mind:[1]

> A man along that road is led
> Which he himself desires to tread;

and for the first time I questioned if my repeated use of the word duty, in connection with this affair, was not due to an attempt on my part to argue my conscience down. But it was too late now to retreat. Ambition as well as duty bade me go on. Then another verse from the Talmud formulated itself unbidden and rang its changes in my mental ear:

> Ambition, as its fate, death and the grave await.

"Open the package, William," I said to my assistant, "remove half its contents, securely close and seal the jar containing the other part and place it in a cool situation in the laboratory cellar." He did as directed, and I turned to my test tubes and reagents.

Systematically I began the task I had undertaken — the examination of the contents of the jar with the object of discovering if it contained a poisonous body. There is no need of a record of all the details of the process. It is enough to state that no mineral poison, no inorganic poisonous acid, was discovered, nor yet the formidable prussic acid. Neither was phosphorus present nor any poisonous metal or salt thereof. There was no trace of an arsenic compound. The most exacting tests gave negative results only, and at last I turned to search for the vegetable bodies known as alkaloids, which, as a rule, are so energetic in action; strychnine, morphine, atropine, being typical of the class. It will be

[1] See "Gems from the Talmud," by Rev. Isadore Myers, B.A.

seen that these bodies embrace the most fearful of the poisons, and, let me add, are detected as a class by certain well-known reagents.

William stood with chin resting nearly on my shoulder and watched the first drop of the sensitive test-liquid slip down the side of the test tube and strike the surface of the acidulated solution I had made from the suspected material. As the two liquids mingled a white cloud sprang into view, and as the denser drop of Mayer's Test sank slowly down into the yellow liquid, following the inclined glass tube to its very bottom, a white cloud marked its pathway, and when the liquids were shaken together a milky solution resulted. Another and yet another drop of the test solution was cautiously added, and the liquids successively mixed, producing yet deeper milkiness; and at last, under the gentle agitation of the turbid liquid, changed into a clear solution holding clots of dirty white precipitate, which, when the tube was allowed to rest, settled to the bottom in a heavy layer.

I turned to my assistant, but no words were necessary; to one conversant with alkaloidal tests this reaction characteristic of the group needed no explanation. Our eyes spoke the message that required no tongue to interpret. But not content with this, I took successive but very small portions of the original liquid and tested them severally with other reagents for the alkaloids, with unmistakable returns from all. Then, as I made a careful record of the result in my note-book, I said: "The next step is to identify the alkaloid."

"I would expect strychnine," my assistant remarked, "for these precipitates seem to me much like those of strychnine."

CHAPTER LVII

SUSIE PLEADS FOR RED-HEAD

"THAT point must be determined," I replied. "It may be strychnine or a mixture. I shall not prejudice myself concerning it." And in the end, after several days had passed, I was fairly well satisfied, although there were some points in connection with the chrome-sulphuric acid test which puzzled me. The blue-violet colour surely did appear, but it was not as characteristic as I should have liked. But after I obtained white microscopic crystals of an alkaloid on a slide which gave the reaction, I said: "You were correct in your prediction, William; strychnine must be present, and such shall be my testimony before the Court of Stringtown County."

But that evening, for the first time, misgivings arose in my mind. They came during the dinner hour, when a companion made an idle query that I could not satisfactorily answer, and so turned lightly aside, but it led me to questionings. I arose from the table and sought my room. I picked up a light novel, but could not interest myself in its contents. I turned to *Chambers' Miscellany*, and by chance opened Volume II. to the record of cases wherein many men had suffered death on circumstantial evidence that in itself seemed with each case to be conclusive of guilt, but which afterward was shown to have been erroneous. That work gave me the shivers. I turned to the Bible, and read part of the Book of Job and laid it

down. I picked up Myers' Gems from the Talmud, and caught but one sentence:

> With the measure with which man metes to men,
> It will be measured to him again.

I closed the book, drew on my overcoat, and in a gathering winter storm started for my laboratory. It was dark, very dark, and yet I went on in the night, for that verse and my disconcerted emotions impelled me to go then and to go there. Lighting up my room, I took out the reagents and the suspected liquid and carefully verified the reactions. I opened the books that are authority on phytochemistry, and studied the pages word by word. Closing them, I stood in thought; then with my hand on the pile of volumes, spoke aloud: "If there be error in this work which I have done, *you* are at fault, not I. But why should I question; am not I a disciple in science and is not science infallible? Is not the chrome reaction of strychnine one of the certainties in chemistry? Even to your bitterness have I tested you," I said, addressing the liquid before me. But still a doubt possessed me, a questioning that would not have been had I possessed enough liquid to obtain large, pure crystals of strychnine; nor would it have been a question in face of the reaction, had no human life been at stake. I raised the window and leaned out of the opening; the scattered flakes of snow that were falling struck my heated forehead, imparting a pleasant tingle with each tiny contact. The cool air was refreshing, for my brain was hot. Dark were the other buildings in the University grounds, dark was the country beyond, for my private laboratory was situated in the second story and permitted a view of the distance. Across the field of my vision came then a stream of

moving lights; the night train from the South was approaching, and I watched it until the animated creation disappeared from view behind the building, and next I heard it whistle for the station. Feeling better now, for the cool air and the diversion of thought had relaxed my nerves and soothed my brain, I turned again to my task, determined to go once more with great care over the work and end it. I do not know how many minutes I devoted to the manipulation — it must have taken half an hour — when came a ring of the bell of the outer door. I raised the window, and saw by the feeble light of the transom beneath that two figures stood just outside the entrance. Two of my friends, I conjectured, and with this thought in mind spoke: "Open the door — it is not locked — and follow the lighted hall to my room, No. 13. You need not knock, open the door and enter."

Again I turned to the tube I held in my hand preparatory to the final test, my back to the door, and was thus employed when it opened. A voice I once knew so well, but had thought never to hear again, spoke: "May I come in, Dr. Drew? I would speak to you."

I turned my head. There stood Susie, and behind her, in the background, appeared the familiar face of old Cupe. I replaced the tube in the rack and next extended my trembling hand to the girl. "Susie," I said, as I asked her to be seated, "this is unexpected."

Unintentionally I glanced at the clock; the girl's eyes followed mine. "It is late, Professor Drew. I felt that, but the train was behind time, and I must return early to-morrow morning." She spoke reservedly.

"Please be seated," I said, for she had not yet taken the proffered chair. But she made no movement. Standing before me, she gazed straight into my eyes,

and by that glance threw back into my life the wild love of other days, the love that had never been suppressed, but which, long encysted in my heart, needed but the sight of its creator to cause it to burst again into life.

"I came to meet you, Mr. Drew," she replied, "to ask a question — yes, to beg a favour."

"If in my power, you need only ask it."

A smile came over her face, a smile that flitted on the instant. "You have my thanks in advance for your good will; and yet I have not named the favour."

"Susie," I impulsively replied, "your will is law to me. Tell me what you wish."

"Promise me that you will not visit Stringtown until after the next session of our quarterly Court."

I stood in astonishment. "Why do you ask this?"

"Promise me not to come."

"But I have legally contracted to testify before the Court. I am bound to appear."

"And does this recently made duty to others so easily overcome your thrice-volunteered pledge to me?"

"My reputation demands that I attend that Court as an expert witness. I shall advance my position as a professional chemist by doing so."

"It is but a little favour that I ask, and already you have promised to grant it. Do you value more your self-ambition than your word to me?"

"I cannot break my contract."

"A friend of yours bids me say a word to you in case I fail, a friend who knows of my visit here."

"And who may this friend be, Susie?"

"Judge Elford. 'Tell Sammy that I say the expert chemist is not an honour to science. Tell him that if he values his reputation, to decline to take an expert's part in this or any other case while conditions are as

now and chemists make themselves partisans for the side that pays them. Tell him that I say keep away from Stringtown during the coming Court session.'"

"The judge has spoken too late, and you come too late, Susie. I am powerless. See" — I pointed to the apparatus about me — "for days have I worked on this Stringtown poison case, have recorded the results, am ready to testify to the facts. I *must* go to that Court; duty calls me."

"And so by means of these glasses you have established the nature of events that once occurred in Stringtown. A man you have not seen for years has died, and you propose to swear concerning the cause of his death?"

"Yes."

"And may I ask, do the sign-glasses augur good to the living, or is the omen such as to lead you to Stringtown to swear a man onto the gallows?"

"Susie, this is not sign lore, this is science. Long since I wiped out of my nature those superstitious signs and omens of which you speak, but which have now no credence with me. This is science, I say, and science speaks unerringly concerning that which is; she tells, too, of things that have passed and predicts those yet to come."

"But you did not answer my question. Do the glasses say that Mr. Nordman died of poison?"

"Yes; but I beg you to keep the fact to yourself. I should not tell you this."

The girl dropped on her knees. "No! I say no! he was not poisoned!" All her composure, her irony, her sarcastic tone of voice, vanished. She wrung her hands, and kneeling thus appeared for the first time a pleading woman, with the heart emotions of a woman. "No,

Mr. Drew, I say it was not poison, even if your science swears it!"

"Compose yourself, Susie."

"You are the only man I fear; no other chemist can come to Stringtown County and impress a jury of our people as your words will do, or antagonise them as they may do. Say that you will not come! grant me this favour!"

"I cannot."

She drew from her bosom a folded paper and took from it a pressed and dried blue flower. "When we stood in the path near my home in old Kentucky the day we last met, you gave me this flower, and of your own accord told me that if ever I wished a favour and presented this flower the favour should be granted. 'Whatever it may be and wherever I shall be,' you said, 'you have but to ask.' I bring you now the flower, and on my knees I beg you to fulfil the promise made the girl long before you contracted with Mr. Putten to read for him the signs in the glasses. Is not the word given to me in the years that have passed as sacred as the legal contract you made but a few days ago? I ask you to drop this Case, to come not to Stringtown during the next term of Court. Believe in me, Mr. Drew; accept my pleadings before you do the signs and omens that you read in these tubes and vessels. I am alive, I have breath, consciousness and love. Those vessels are dead, insensible. Will you not take my word before that of lifeless objects, which I, who live and reason, say have not told the truth?"

"I cannot. Ask anything else but this. See, that blue-violet colouration of strychnine." I held the vessel and applied the test before her eyes.

Dropping the withered flower on the floor, she arose

and placed her foot upon it. "And this you call duty, this breaking of a sacred promise given to one who treasured your words and had no hope for happiness beyond the bare words you then spoke, and those other unframed words you wished to utter and which I longed to hear you say. You now speak of duty, but this manner of duty that you are acting I call murder, for your words will hang an innocent man!"

"Of whom do you speak, Susie? whom am I to hang by my evidence?"

"Do you not know?"

"I do not."

"Red-Head. He is charged with poisoning Mr. Nordman, and lies now in the jail of Stringtown County."

Suddenly there came into my heart a sensation akin to exultation. Red-Head, my antagonist of former times, my rival yet, charged with murder, and the evidence resting in my hands to convict him. Once I had a doubt concerning the reaction for strychnine; I came this very evening in a questioning mood, for some things concerning the colour were not quite clear; but there was no doubt now.

"Susie," I said, and I spoke with deliberation, "do you remember the evening Red-Head held my hands together and sneered in my face, the evening in your home when I told him that never again would I fight him after the manner brutes fight? Do you recollect that I said the time would come when I could use my brain instead of my fists, and predicted that brain would win? Do you recollect that?"

The girl no longer shrank from me, she no longer stood in supplication, but with erect head and flashing eye she answered: "And this you call the triumph of

brain over muscle? The unsophisticated country boy who lies in the jail of Stringtown County's seat is to be hung by you, the professor of chemistry in this great University! The prisoner is defenceless, and yet he is as innocent as he is defenceless. When the noose tightens about his throat your position as a chemist will be established, you say. God help you, man of science, you who permit ambition to trample down your love for woman, to crush your humanity to man, to break the sacred pledge given in confidence to one who trusted you!"

"Susie, as sure as the sun ever shone I found strychnine in that specimen. As God lives, I swear it."

"But if Red-Head dies a criminal and afterward it should be proven that there was no strychnine in your glasses?"

"That day or night — yes, that very hour, I will pay the penalty with my own life. I know how to mix potions that leave no mark and yet do their work promptly. If this be not strychnine my life goes out."

She turned to the negro, seemingly without having heard my fearful pledge. "Bring the money, Cupe; other inducements than the pleadings of a lone girl must be made, to affect a man bound to science."

The negro came forward, bearing a valise, from which he took a heavy box; this he placed on the table near me. "Ma'se Sammy, et am de gol' out ob de ole chist in de grabeya'd. De false bott'm what de little key op'n'd cubbahed what de sheriff could n't fin'."

He opened the box; it was filled with gold coin; never had I seen so much gold, never before had such wealth been within my grasp.

"Take it all, Mr. Drew, and spare Red-Head. I ask you to fulfill the promise made me years ago, and I

bring you here a fee that will exceed many times that paid by the prosecutor of Stringtown County. By right of priority, by right of a sacred promise, by the professional touch of gold, I ask that you serve me and not the Commonwealth."

"You humiliate me, Susie. I cannot sell myself, you know it."

"Take it all, and keep away from our Court. Let the boy live."

"I shall go to the Court of Stringtown County and testify to the truth." My eyes were fixed upon her face, my voice was firm and determined. She saw that no hope remained.

"You will regret this decision, but I now say never shall your evidence hang Red-Head."

"But if he is proven guilty?"

"He must not hang. Now I shall seek the man who will listen to the appeal of justice, who can stand between this uncultured country boy and the scaffold. I came to you of my own will, not by the counsel or consent of Red-Head. He defies both you and your art; he said to me: 'Go to the mountains of Eastern Kentucky, take this letter'" (she drew a letter from her pocket) "'find the man addressed and say to him that Read-Head lies in the jail of Stringtown County, charged with murder that he did not do.'"

I reached out my hand; she did not put the letter into it, but held it before my eyes so that I could read the superscription:

Old Man Holcomb,
Bald Knob, Kentucky.

She turned to depart, preceded by Cupe, who bore the heavy package of gold; but before she closed the door I

spoke again: "Susie, the night is dark. Let us forget that we have had this difference. May I not go with you, Susie?"

"I have no fear of any living person. Of the dead there is no danger." Then she spoke again one last word of appeal. "Mr. Drew, as you value human life — and more lives than one must go if Red-Head dies — I beg you not to come to the next Court session of Stringtown County."

I shook my head.

"On your own account I plead with you, do not run this great risk. Grant me this little favour."

Again I refused, and the next moment, alone with my thoughts and with my science provings, my beaker glasses, test tubes and reagents, I stood questioning the future.

CHAPTER LVIII

"POW'FUL INTERESTIN' STORY" (I JOHN, III)

THE mountains of Eastern Kentucky, their stores of endless wealth, of mine, of quarry, and of wood, their picturesque knobs and rocks, valleys, torrents, brooks and solitudes, must one and all be seen to be appreciated.

There are taller mountain chains than these, and larger ones, too; grander cañons are to be seen in the Yellowstone and along the Colorado, and in the Rockies rise higher bluffs of black and red stone. No lava beds in these Kentucky mountains speak of volcanic action, no volcanic peaks cone the sky. The Laurentian chain of Canada bears endless tear-bound firs, these do not; there is no other Tacoma than the one which in Washington State glitters in the sunlight and commands homage from both the ocean of waters on the west and the ocean of sand on the east. And yet while bluff and ice and snow and fire and lava are not in the Kentucky Mountains as they are elsewhere, charms there are which no other chains possess.

The girl who pleaded with the University professor for the life of Red-Head was now traversing these mountain wilds on the back of a mule. Faithful Cupe trudged on foot by her side. For some days they had been beyond the track even of mountain wagon wheels. The bluffs were either overhanging above or precipitous below, but always present. The streams were often bank-full, so that in order to progress long circuits were necessary;

but still she kept on her way, preceded by a young man, who spoke but little and seemed concerned only in reaching his destination. At last they neared a deserted cabin, windowless and roofless. The chimney had fallen, the logs were decayed and the mud chinking between them had disappeared. A brook ran in the gulch near it, while behind stretched a rock-clad hog-back hill that separated this brook from the stream beyond. Hitching their horse in the ravine where ran the trail, the young mountaineer tramped a path to the site of the old cabin, the girl following.

"Here's the place," he said, "but et ain't no great shakes."

The girl stood a moment looking at the scene of desolation, and as she did so her mind reverted to the Stringtown schoolhouse and to the story of the feud related by the Red-Headed Boy. The door was gone but fragments of the casing still hung by two beaten iron nails, and the rests for the iron bar that once held the door were yet in place in the logs beside the doorway. She seated herself on the heavy timber sill. Her eyes fell to the projecting log by her side. A dark blue piece of metal, partly coated with a white crust, was imbedded in the end of it, a piece of metal from which the wood had partly rotted away. With her fingers she scraped the soft wood mould from about it, and then raised from its resting-place a flattened weather-corroded minie bullet, around which still were to be seen the creases that once held the cartridge shell in place. A shudder came over her; she dropped the fragment into her pocket and raised her eyes; there in the trail below them, the muzzle of a long gun in his hand, stood a grizzled old man looking intently at that picturesque scene — the beautiful girl seemingly so out of place in the doorway of those ruins.

At this instant the young man caught sight of the intruder.

"Thet 's him."

"Who?"

"Old Holcomb."

The girl arose and started back along the trail, this time preceding her companion, back toward the tall man. His form was lank and uncouth, his hair thin and white, his face covered with a crop of beard that had been roughly trimmed with the scissors. He did not speak, nor did the girl until she stood close beside him.

"Are you Mr. Holcomb?"

"I 'm Holcomb."

"I came to bring you a message."

"From who?"

"An enemy."

"I hain't but one, an' he 's a coward."

The girl's eyes flashed, her fists clenched hard together, the bullet in her pocket burned the flesh it pressed against. She took it out and held the disfigured mass of lead before his face.

"He was n't coward enough to shoot an ounce of lead through a four-year-old child."

Not a movement did the man make. His eye pierced her through, but she did not flinch. "An' who be yo' ter tell Holcomb this; 'dy want ter wedge inter the feud?"

"Never mind who I am. I know who you are and what you did. But I did not seek you to talk over these things. I came to deliver a message." She took from her pocket the letter she had already shown to Professor Drew, and held it out.

Taking it, but without opening it, the man asked: "An' hev yo' come fur?"

"From Stringtown."

"Yo' can't git back ter Hawley's claim ter-night, an' thet's the nearest stoppin'-place. Yoah shoes air thin an' yo' air shiverin' like a young lamb in sleety weather. Yo' wants ter be warmed up an' fed up, an' yo 'd better go crost the divide ter my cabin, an' we 'll settle the other matter thar. Yo 'll hev ter stay all night ha'ar-'bouts."

These words were spoken in a kindly tone, and the girl realised that he told the truth; but she knew, too, that excitement, not cold, was responsible for her shivering. Mounting their horses, the two travellers followed the old man to his home.

In the common room of that cabin, while she sat close to the fire, he held the letter long in his hands, turning it about and eyeing it curiously. "Guess yo 'll hev ter read et ter me," he said; then tore it open and handed it to the girl, who complied, reading as follows:

HOLCOMB: I 'm Red-Head. I did n't come back ter the moun'ns ter finish the feud 'cause I promised Susie not ter fight lessen she married Drew. Then I 'tended ter whip Drew first an' shoot yo' next. But I can't do either, fo' I 'm in jail. Drew 's got the pull, too, an' lessen I git help he 'll hang me fo' killin' a man I did n't kill. I 'm not a pizoner, an' yo' know et. I 'm not a coward, an' yo' know et. What I wants is fo' yo' ter come ter Stringtown an' keep me from bein' hung. You ain't much ov a friend, but yo 've got grit an' got sense an' kin shoot, an' thet 's the kind ov a friend I needs now. Yo' know et 'ud disgrace the family yo' fought fer, an' the family you fought, fer me ter be hung, an' I mussent be hung. Ef yo 'll come, tell Susie, 'n she 'll tell me. Come ter the Stringtown County Court an' stop the hangin' an' end the feud.

RED-HEAD.

When the girl ceased reading Holcomb took the letter

and scrutinised it again. Evidently his thoughts were not altogether in the present, for after a period of silence he musingly remarked:

"Ef he 's like his kin, et 's the truth he told when he said thet he 's not a coward. Them war a brave family, an' grit, else thar 'd been mo'ah 'n one Holcomb livin'."

Turning to the girl, he said abruptly: "I 've sot in this old cabin nigh onter twenty years waitin' fer Red-Head. I 've watched the trail in winter an' laid in the shade in summer fightin' sketers an' flies an' keepin' my eyes on the path ter git the drop on him befo' he seed me. But he did n't come. Then I thunk thet he 'd turned coward, but no moun'n Nordman ever showed the white feather; 'n he said too when he left: 'Tell Holcomb I 'll be back when I kin handle a Springfield gun.' An' when I seed yo' two a-ridin' up the gulch I felt monstrous good, fer I thought p'raps he 'd come back, but without his moun'n manners, fer no moun'n man in a feud would hev rid in the open like yo' did. An' I saw yo' tramp up ter the old cabin an' sot down an' pick the bullet out ov the log. Then yo' saw me, fer I seed thet black-ha'red feller war not Red-Head, an' stepped inter sight."

The girl shuddered, and the speaker said: "Sit closer ter the fire, little one; I 'm pow'ful sorry fer sech squeemish buds es yo' be." Then he asked: "Red-Head 's in jail the writin' sez?"

"Yes."

"Fer killin' a man?"

"Yes."

"War et on the square?"

"He did not kill him. Mr. Nordman died suddenly, and Red-Head was charged with giving him poison."

Holcomb sat in silence a time, and then spoke in

reverie: "An' he axes help from Holcomb, me who wanted to shoot him befo' I died, me who killed his father an' his mother an' his little sister, me who hev lived alone in this cabin fer twenty years beca'se his gun an' the guns ov his kin hed killed every other Holcomb but me. Et 's a shame thet sech a family es his'n an' sech a family es our'n should be disgraced by the puttin' ov one ov 'em in jail fer pizonin'. I hates Red-Head beca'se of the feud, an' I wants ter shoot him pow'ful much, but ef he gits hung we can't fight et out." Turning to the girl again, he asked: "Are yo' sure thet he did n't pizon the man?"

"I know he did not. He swore to me on his bended knees that he did not, and — he loves me."

"An' yo' loves him?"

"I am his friend."

"Chick" — and the old man reached out his lank hand and gently stroked her hair — "chick, Holcomb is awful sorry fer you-uns, fer Holcomb es bound ter kill thet boy." Then he mused again. "Child, ef Holcomb 'll swar' off the feud, an 'll go ter Stringtown an' save Red-Head, will yo' marry Red-Head an' move ter the moun'ns?"

The girl covered her face with her handkerchief.

"An' ef Holcomb 'll make over his property ter Red-Head an' yo', will yo' name the first boy baby Holcomb?"

The girl made no reply, but sobbed quietly.

"Thar ain't no use in sayin' nuthin' mo'ah; you-uns understands we-uns, an' yo' may go back ter Stringtown an' say ter Red-Head these words: 'Old Holcomb says, says he, thet he 'll be on hand when the day comes fer business, an' that he 'll save the honour ov the two families one way er nuther.' Now stop yer cryin', little one, fer

thar ain't no danger ov the shame ov hangin' come'n ter Red-Head."

When "early candle-light" appeared, which was the time for retiring, Holcomb brought an antiquated book from out the cupboard, a copy of a Bible that had once been much used. "Et have been many a day sense a woman sot in this cabin. Thet's the Bible ov my gran'mam, whose great gran'mam brought et from Inglan'. After she died et war read by my wife every night, an' war being read by her that night when Red-Head's dad shot through the winder 'n killed our boy, who wah pow'ful religious, too." He turned the leaves of the book, evidently seeking a certain chapter, but as he could not read, Susie wondered how he expected to locate it. Suddenly he stopped. "Thet's the place now." A great brown blot of irregular shape was splotched over one of the yellowed sheets. "Thet's the blood ov the boy. Mam never finished the chapter, she could n't b'ar ter look at the place ag'in. I've wanted ter hev et read out fer twenty years, fer et's a pow'ful interestin' story. Ef yo' 'll jest read the chapter out we 'll hev prayers, an' then yo' kin go ter bed in the nex' room." And when Susie had finished reading the "pow'ful interestin' story" (1 John, iii.) Holcomb said: "Them's my sentiments too," then kneeled and offered up prayers in a homely way that spoke of his earnestness and faith in the teachings of his parents. "Now, chick," said Holcomb, "yo' 'll sleep in the nex' room, 'n this young feller 'n me 'll sleep in this 'n. The nigger kin go ter the outside cabin."

"Ef yo' please, sah, Mr. Holcom', de nigger 'll jes lie down befo' de doah ob de room de chile sleeps in. He doan 'tend ter run no risk ob cotchin' cole in de wood-

shed, an' he doan 'tend ter hab de chile in one house an' Cupe be in de uddah. Ef de Susie gearl speaks in de night, Cupe 'll be in his place befo' de doah."

Next morning the three persons, old Holcomb in front, returned along the mountain trail. All day long, with his heavy rifle over his shoulder, the old man continued in the advance; finally, near sundown, he relinquished his charge to a man who stood before a double cabin near the road, and who in some manner had been advised of their approach and was expecting them. "Yo 'll stop fer the night ha'ar, an' in the mornin' he 'll see yo' ter the next stop. Thar ain't no danger ter yo' in these moun'ns now, fer Holcomb hev passed the word 'long thet yo 're his friend an' air ter be shown ter the stage line. Et 's sure death ter the feller what troubles yo'."

Taking the hand of the girl in his rough palm, the old man again stroked her hair with the other, as he had done in the cabin, gently, tenderly; then in a low tone, very low, said: "An' yo 'll name the first boy Holcomb, won't yo', jest fer the honour ov the two families, an' fer the sake ov the old man who hain't no kin left ter leave his name to?" Then without waiting a reply, he added: "Tell Red-Head ter rest easy, fer Holcomb 'll be on hand an' stop the hangin' sure; ef thar ain't one way ter do et, thar air another; thar 'll not be no disgrace of hanging on yo-uns an' we-uns, child." He turned and left the party in the hands of their new protector, and in the dusk of evening passed from sight up the gorge that led back into the higher mountains.

CHAPTER LIX

"MORE LIVES THAN ONE MUST GO IF RED-HEAD DIES"

THE day arrived for me, the chemist of the University, to return to Stringtown on my professional errand, and I decided to start the week previous to the convening of the quarterly Court. Carefully collecting the reagents, apparatus and the specimens of the contents of the suspected stomach, I next fortified myself with my books of authority. These were packed in a specially arranged valise, which, I may add, I did not this time lug across the Suspension Bridge which stretched between Cincinnati and Covington.

Sleepy old Stringtown was reached at last, and there at the door of our old home stood my mother. She was feeble now — I caught that fact from afar — her hair, too, was very white. I shall say nothing regarding our meeting, which concerns ourselves alone. That evening I walked down the narrow sidewalk toward the grocery store of Mr. Cumback, meeting a few old friends on the way and several strangers. I opened the door of the grocery, the door against the glass of which years before I had seen the white face of a rebel soldier press; that very pane of glass was in place, for I recognised it by a well-known blemish across its centre. A circle of men sat around the old stove, and Mr. Cumback stood behind the counter. Most of the members were new to me, although three of the old-time partici-

pants were present. But how changed! Judge Elford was grand in his venerable, patriarchal appearance, very feeble but his intellectuality had not diminished; white was every thread of his beard and of his flowing hair. He arose as I entered and grasped my hand; his eye pierced me through, but very kindly was that eye-greeting. "Welcome back to Stringtown, Sammy," he said; "these years we have been expecting you on old friendship's account, but now that you come on professional business we are not less delighted to greet you. You honour us, my boy. We have kept watch of your upward course, and hope that you will never forget that your land is Kentucky, that you were once a Stringtown boy, and that here you have many friends." Then Professor Drake took his turn, giving my hand a gentle grasp. "Sorry you did not come last night, Mr. Drew, for I read a paper on evolution and talked about that very interesting subject. You could have given us much information concerning it. Don't fail to help your old friends by a good word, Samuel, whenever occasion permits it."

CHAPTER LX

TROUBLE IN STRINGTOWN COUNTY COURT

JUDGE ELFORD arose, and locking his arm in mine moved toward the door, as he did so excusing both of us to the circle. "Mr. Drew will return another evening," he remarked. "I would speak to him in the quiet of my home to-night." Something in the tone of his voice led me to know that he wished to talk seriously in private, and as if to impress the fact more emphatically, we walked in silence to his home.

"Did you notice the tall, white-haired man who left the room before we did?" he abruptly asked.

"Yes."

"That man has been in Stringtown for a week. He stops at the tavern, but has no business here, unless it be in connection with this case in which you are concerned. He has been asking questions of all kinds regarding Red-Head and yourself, and has inquired into every detail of the poisoning affair. He has interested himself in Red-Head's record since he came among us as a boy. That he is not alone is shown by the fact that many uncouth men call to see him, but they soon depart. The rumour has gotten out that he is a friend of Red-Head, from the mountains, and that a scheme for the boy's rescue is contemplated."

"And how am I concerned, Judge?"

"That I shall now tell you, Sammy. Would to God

you had kept out of this case! You were asked to remain away from Stringtown until after Court week, were you not?" His eyes were upon me.

"Yes."

"And the messenger told you that such was also my desire and advice?"

"Yes."

"Did you forget that twice you promised to follow my advice when the time arrived for me to serve you by asking you to grant me a favour?"

I made no reply.

"As a judge, sworn to do the duty of a judge to this great Commonwealth of Kentucky, I could not well do more. As a friend to you, I could not do less. Why did you not take the advice of your two friends?" Before I could answer, had I any reply to make, he continued: "Ugly things are being said in Stringtown. The people of Stringtown County, too, are concerned in this case, more so even than when old Cupe was tried for stealing the gold. There are factions among us, and some viciousness begins to creep out; not that Red-Head has made friends, but that this thing of sending outside the State for an expert to testify against one of our citizens is an innovation."

"But why do they accept that my testimony will be against him?"

"Because you are engaged by the prosecution, and people believe that chemical experts sell their evidence and give their testimony to support the claims of the side that engages them; and," he added, "it also seems to me that expert chemical testimony is not always on the highest moral plane."

"But I surely found strychnine, Judge; should I not give my evidence?"

"I LOVE the dust
of that old pike"

"It is now too late to retreat, and for this reason I would speak to you in confidence, Sammy. Your father was my friend; you need advice, as I once felt you might, and even though I am to be the judge of this case, I am in duty bound to give it."

"You have my thanks for your interest, and I regret now that I did not take the hint you sent by Susie."

"Had I not believed that you would listen to *her* pleadings, I might have made it stronger, but it is now too late. Sammy," he continued, "are you satisfied concerning the chemical provings you have made?"

"I am."

"Is it not probable, or at least possible, that you place too great credence in statements made by authorities in whom you confide?"

"No, for I have verified the reactions."

"May not conditions unknown to you induce other bodies than strychnine to give the same reactions?"

"Positively not."

"Are you" — he hesitated slightly — "proof against prejudice that on the one hand binds you to blind confidence in scientific methods, and on the other hand leads you to desire to help the side that secured your services?"

I winced, for I felt the thrust even through the kindly tone of the judge.

"I am a man of science, and free from prejudice."

"The faith you men of science have in human authority, and the sneers you cast on the Supreme Ruler, and the dogmatic conclusions of men who search in fields your science is too feeble to invade, seem to me very near man-worship or egotistical fanaticism. Sir" — he spoke severely now — "I fail to see the difference between your blind allegiance to ever-changing science and the fanatical faith of a superstitious slave bound to

signs and omens, which result from the empirical observation of cycles of phenomena; but let that thought pass and turn to your own self. Are you free from human error?"

"Yes, in this case, for I have gone over the reactions again and again."

"Enough, Sammy, enough; would that I, too, felt this same confidence in man's infallibility and in the science that holds you in her toils. I am an old man, my child, and have met many dramatic and pathetic experiences. I have seen men shot in the heat of passion, and have sentenced men to the gallows on the testimony of witnesses who saw the plunge of the knife or the flash of the pistol held by the murderer. But never yet have I been forced to condemn a man to the gallows on the evidence of a person who was in another State at the time of the murder, who not only did not see the crime committed, but who knew nothing about its occurrence. And, Sammy, while duty to the Commonwealth will not permit me ever to shrink from doing my duty to man and men, in all earnestness I pray God to strike me dead before on the expert testimony of Samuel Drew I am forced to hang this boy. Mark well your words, Sammy; on them rests a human life. A defenceless man to whom life is sweet lies now in the Stringtown County jail,—one from whom no man has the right unlawfully to take one bright day. Mark well, too, the position of your old friend, the judge, who begs you to err on the side of humanity rather than to do a wrong in the belief that science is infallible. Give this helpless man the benefit of every doubt, whether it humiliates your science, disturbs your dogmatism, or checks your ambition. In after years you will find that you have made no mistake."

I arose to go, arose without conceding that there was

a chance for me to err or relent. At the door the judge held my hand long, and after bidding me good-bye said, in the most earnest tone I had ever known him to use: "God grant, Samuel Drew, that you do not cause me to hang an innocent man;" and after I had passed from his door he called me back. "Sammy, there will be trouble next week; bear up bravely, dare to do right even though it be at ambition's expense. Sammy," and his voice sank very low, almost to a whisper, as his lips spoke into my ear, "keep what I say in confidence. The old man you saw leave the grocery is named Holcomb; he came to me last night and I drew up his will. He left all his possessions, both real and personal, to Red-Head and Susie, share and share alike; but said he, 'In case Red-Head dies — and he may die suddenly, but will never be hung — it must all go to the girl Susie.' There 'll be trouble in Stringtown County Court next week, Sammy."

I attempted to withdraw my hand, but the speaker firmly held it and continued:

"This is Kentucky, not Ohio; Kentucky, Sammy."

From the door of Judge Elford I turned with heavy heart and lagging footstep toward the home of my mother, realising now that the coming week would bring a death crisis to some one I knew, and for the first time I appreciated the fact that I was not a mere onlooker.

These closing words were in my mind when I raised my eyes from the ground because of a step that sounded on the stones ahead of me. A tall form came into the moonlight, passed me close and disappeared behind me. It was the old man from the mountains.

CHAPTER LXI

SUSIE, RED-HEAD, AND MYSELF AGAIN

THE morning of the trial dawned, and I entered the special bus that had been engaged to take two attorneys, the judge, a few close friends of these gentlemen — a few jurymen among them — and myself to Court. It was the way that I had passed to the trial of Cupe.

I looked neither to the right nor to the left as we passed through the village, but followed Judge Elford to the court-house, where I felt a sensation of relief as I entered the portals of that stone building, with its great round pillars in front and its iron-barred jail in the rear. I then held my final audience with the prosecuting attorney, and at last stepped into the court-room of Stringtown County.

The judge sat in his place exactly as he did when last I saw him, years ago, in that same seat. Time had enfeebled him physically, but not mentally, for that fine intellectual face and placid brow were surely the more impressive by reason of the lines that age had deepened, and by the touch of brighter silver left in his snow-white beard and hair.

The jury was in its place, its members typical of the former jury before which in this very room I had been a witness; some of them may have been the same individuals. Before each man stood that ever-present box of sawdust, and from the movement of their jaws or the

pouched cheek it could be seen that none needed to be instructed concerning the object of these utensils. I seated myself by the side of the prosecuting attorney, and then raised my eyes to the chair where sat the man charged with murder, the very place and apparently the same chair in which Cupe once sat. His hair was red as of yore, sorrel-red, like no other hair I had ever seen; his eyes were fixed on my face, those same little yellow eyes; his red ears and that florid face covered with freckles were before me again, lanker and longer was that crimson neck. I looked him square in the eye, and then my glance, not his, fell to the floor, but not before I caught a glimpse of a gentle movement of the left ear, the mocking movement familiar in other years, and I knew that he yet defied me.

When next I raised my eyes they caught the form of the sheriff, who with a brace of pistols in his leather belt stood close to the prisoner, and then I turned to the audience. The room was filled with men, and no one needed to tell me they were from both near and far. I recognised many Stringtown men, I also saw many whom I felt were men of Stringtown County, and there, too, sat the tall man from the mountains of Kentucky. In full view of the prisoner, neither seemed to notice the other. He was flanked on either side by a line of men dressed in the same manner as himself; indeed, I should say that he formed the central figure of a group distinct from our home folks, but they seemed not to know each other.

And then my eyes turned toward the front row, scanning each face until they rested on that of one I had not thought to meet again in the Court of Stringtown County. There sat Susie, her eyes fixed on space. My heart fluttered and I wished that instead

of sitting by the prosecutor I were in the place of old negro Cupe, who sat by her side. Then came a mental inventory, and by a mind-flash I saw that we three, Susie, Red-Head and myself, were once more confronting one another and our fate; and I saw too, that seemingly we had drawn into the turmoil all who both loved and hated us, and it seemed to me as though, be it superstition or not, every condition necessary to a tragic end of one or all was now perfected. I knew the nature of the men about, I knew that many men had but to put their hands inside their coats to defend their honour or their friends, and I realised, too, that every man present knew both his enemy and his friend; but no evidence of this fact could be seen in face or action. Then I turned again to Judge Elford, he whom every man in the room respected, he who stood now before all this assemblage sworn to sift the right from the wrong, and who I knew — for he had told me so — believed that before this case closed some of those present would have seen their last of earth.

The case opened in the usual way, and interest soon centred in the evidence that came rapidly before the Court and jury. The prosecution announced that it intended to prove that poison was the cause of Mr. Nordman's death and that the drug had been purchased by the prisoner, and administered by him to the victim. To this the attorneys for the defence interposed a denial, feebly it seemed to me, although it is possible that being in the dark concerning the nature of the evidence to be offered, they could not in opening make their denial stronger. As the trial progressed it could be seen that the judge proposed to confine both parties to a strict statement of fact, for every attempt to interject side issues or to go into personalities was skilfully defeated

by his rulings, and yet the day passed before the prosecutor was ready to call me as a witness. Every step was tenaciously combated by counsel for the defence, who, as the theory of the prosecution unfolded itself, became aggressively violent and left no stone unturned in his attempt to discredit a witness or cast a doubt on the evidence. When time for adjournment came that night, the prosecution had proven:

First. That Red-Head and Mr. Nordman had quarrelled a few days previously to his death. It was shown that, out of patience with his indolent habits, Mr. Nordman had that day scolded him for not working. The witness who testified to this stripped tobacco in Mr. Nordman's barn and heard every word of the altercation, and also heard Red-Head swear that he would be revenged.

Second. The village druggist testified that he sold Red-Head one-eighth ounce of strychnine. His book of poison sales on which the entry had been made and dated was produced and admitted as evidence. The prisoner had stated that the strychnine was for Mr. Nordman, who desired to put it in the carcass of a lamb that had been killed by foxes, which latter he hoped to kill when they returned to feed, the coming night.

Third. The servants testified that Mr. Nordman arose in good health the morning of his death, ate a light breakfast, as was his habit, and that Red-Head alone breakfasted with him. Very soon thereafter he was stricken with a severe pain in the stomach, and then they gave him a dose of laudanum and called the physician.

Fourth. The physician testified that he found Mr. Nordman in great pain, muscular convulsions having set in and paralysis of the legs. He administered an emetic,

to which, however, the patient did not freely respond. In reply to a direct question of the prosecutor, the witness said that the case presented all the symptoms of strychnine poisoning.

This closed the evidence of the day, and I was informed by the prosecution that my testimony would be taken immediately after Court convened the next morning.

CHAPTER LXII

"THE FEUD IS OVER, HOLCOMB"

THAT night I awoke often, for in my ears rang again and again the words of Judge Elford: "You will hang the prisoner, Sammy."

That sentence still dominated my mind when Court convened next morning; but when I looked at the presiding judge no evidence of emotion on his part could be seen; passive and composed he sat looking about the room, apparently as unconscious of personal responsibility as any of the spectators. I seated myself by the side of the prosecutor and proceeded to arrange my specimens, reagents and the apparatus. The eyes of all in the Court were now concentrated on me, even to that of the prisoner, who, scarce ten feet distant, sat beside the armed sheriff. Seemingly absorbed in manipulative operations, I yet noticed every movement of those about me; from time to time I raised my eyes only to catch the fixed gaze of whomsoever they rested on, wheresoever they turned — jurymen, sheriff, attorney for the prosecution and for the defence, Holcomb from the mountains, Cupe, Red-Head and Susie, all — all I say but one, Judge Elford. He seemed unconcerned regarding either my presence or my movements.

That he awaited my convenience I knew, and that this famous case had drawn itself down and had focussed itself on me I also knew. Amid intense stillness, friend and foe, faction, feudist, judge, prisoner and jury were

awaiting my voice. I turned my eyes to the jury; not a mouth was in motion, firm set were each pair of jaws, never before had such a thing been known in Kentucky. The last touch was given the vessels before me, and then I whispered to the attorney by whose side I sat: "I am ready," and raised my eyes to the face of the judge, who, catching the movement, without awaiting voice to bid him open the Court, bade me arise. A strange innovation did he then make, an innovation that struck me to the heart; for instead of turning me over to the clerk to be sworn, as had been done with all other witnesses, he too arose, and before him I held up my hand, and from him came in deep, measured tones the question of that solemn oath: "Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"I do."

My voice startled me. If any man who reads these lines could have been in my place, he too would have been startled by that first word. The past, with its presentiments and omens, now crystallising into form, the midnight pleadings of the girl I loved, the solemn advice of Judge Elford, yet were in my ear. The ominous circle before me, the doubt concerning the reception of my testimony, and lastly the pensive face of Susie to my right and the hateful face of Red-Head to my left were enough to dispossess one more experienced. But the sensation that followed these words passed and in the calm that followed I became myself, ready to protect my reputation. I looked at Red-Head; his gaze was fixed on me; our eyes met, and I saw in them the full measure of hate I felt in my own heart; and then I said to myself: "If I don't hang that fellow he will shoot me dead when next we meet. If brain does not conquer now, it will be muscles' turn next." Point by

point the prosecution drew from me the statement that I had examined the suspected liquid for all known poisons, both inorganic and organic. And then I was led to the reactions of strychnine and to its location among the poisons. These I gave in detail, the particulars of which need not be repeated, and finally I was asked:

"Did you get those reactions from the substance tested?"

"I did."

"Have you specimens of the substance?"

"I have."

"Can you show the jury and the Court the group test for alkaloids and also the colour of reactions of strychnine?"

"I can."

"I ask, then, that Professor Drew be allowed to corroborate his testimony by experiments that will substantiate his words;" and on this point, after a legal battle with the attorneys for the defence, the judge ruled in our favour. Then I made the tests for alkaloids with the group reagents showing the presence of alkaloids. Next I made the respective colour test with morphine which did not respond and then with strychnine which did, each juryman craning his neck close about me in order to get a good view of the purple or blue-violet colour that sprang into existence in that porcelain dish, where the strychnine test was applied, to fade away into green and red.

"That is the reaction of strychnine," I said, and proved it by means of a crystal of pure strychnine.

Then came the final question: "You swear that you found strychnine in the contents of that stomach?"

"I do."

Opposing counsel now viciously assailed me, but to

no avail, for I brought forth my authorities and showed that this test was accepted by chemists of the world, and that Fowne, Fresenius, Turner, all considered it conclusive, and at last triumphant, I was dismissed.

Judge Elford now came down from his chair. "Repeat the tests that I may see them close," he said. He stood over me, and side by side, both with strychnine and the suspected substance, I gave the test for alkaloids and also the colour test for strychnine. The same violet-blue colour came with both.

"Will no other substance produce that reaction?"

"None."

"This is a great world; there are many countries in it; do none of the thousands of forms of vegetation in these various lands act as does this substance?" He spoke into my very ear.

"Not to my knowledge. Science says no."

"The servants administered a dose of laudanum, and laudanum contains morphine. Is not morphine an alkaloid?"

"Yes; I have testified to the fact that I also obtained the colour reaction of morphine, but that alkaloid will not give this strychnine reaction. Morphine is present, so is strychnine."

"Have you tried this test with every plant, shrub, tree, leaf, root, bark, fruit, that grows?"

"No, sir!"

"Have you tried it with all that grow in Stringtown County?"

"No, sir!"

"Have you tried it with all that grow in and about Stringtown village?"

"No, sir!"

"Have you applied this test to every form of herb,

fruit, vegetable, grass, leaf, that grows on the farm of the late Mr. Nordman?"

"No, sir!"

"Or in his dooryard?"

"No, sir!"

"Can you, then, in the face of the fact that you have not tested these myriads of other substances, swear that this is strychnine?"

"On the strength of these authorities" — I pointed to my books — "and on my investigations, and on the fact that no other known bodies produce the same reactions, I can."

"You revived the strychnine crystals, it seems" — he pointed to the microscopic slide.

"Yes, sir!"

"Will no other substance produce such needle-like crystals?"

"I know of none to do so and then react as they do."

"Would it not have been well to get from the contents of that stomach enough of the pure strychnine to kill a rabbit, and show its poisonous action in that way?"

"I had not enough of the material."

"You are willing" — and now the judge spoke very slowly and deliberately — "you are willing, then, Samuel Drew, before Almighty God, knowing that on your words hangs the life of a human being, to swear that strychnine, only strychnine, nothing but strychnine, could have produced that reaction?"

"I am."

The eyes of the man of justice fell upon his book, and he made a note. I turned my eyes to the prisoner; he sneered in return. I sought the face of Susie, but no expression other than sadness could be seen. Then the

attorney said, "The witness may be excused," and I turned my gaze upon the floor. After the cross-examination which did not in any way break the force of the evidence the case was ready for the defence, the prosecution having proved:

First. Mr. Nordman and Red-Head had quarrelled.

Second. Red-Head had bought strychnine of the village druggist.

Third. Mr. Nordman had been suddenly stricken by a severe pain in his stomach, accompanied by paroxysmal muscular contractions.

Fourth. Strychnine was present in the contents of the stomach.

But night was on us again, and Court now adjourned. The next day was consumed in evidence for the defence, then came the rebuttal by the prosecution, which right was waived.

The fourth morning found the audience in place; had photographs been taken, the same faces would have been seen in the same places, so far as the persons directly interested in the case were concerned. I do not like to reflect over the address of the attorney for the defence, who, following the opening speech of the prosecution, and realising that the evidence was against him, turned all his eloquence in the direction of emotional humanity. He depicted the unfortunate position of the homeless, helpless young man before us. He pictured my conspicuous place in life; he drew the sympathies of that audience to the prisoner, and upon me he directed their ill-will and scowls. Hatred flashed from many an eye as he took that little porcelain dish in his hand, and said: "That man comes here from the North, he touches a liquid with a bit of stuff, and it turns blue, violet-blue, for an instant. He asks you, men of Stringtown County,

to hang a resident of Stringtown County because this blue colour comes in a dish. Kentuckians, did ever Kentucky Court witness such a farce? When a man plunges a knife into another, a witness may swear to the fact, for that is evidence of fact. When a witness swears that he saw the flash of the gun or pistol, and saw the victim fall, that is competent testimony; but when a man comes from afar and touches a dish with a glass rod, and asks you to hang a Kentuckian because a spot of porcelain turns purple, that is audacious presumption, and is neither evidence nor testimony. Kentuckians, I swear by all that is holy, that if you become a party to this monstrous crime, a few dollars hereafter will hire a horde of hungry chemists from the North to show a colour in a dish to whoever cares wrongly to gain an inheritance or wishes to hang an enemy. There will scarcely be time to keep the gallows oiled, so rapid will be the hangings in Kentucky. No rich man will rest in his grave with a whole stomach, for these ghouls will find chemists to swear that all who die are poisoned."

Turning to me, he shook his finger in my face. "There sits a man who lived once in Stringtown, who should love his village and his State, but who comes back to us to hang the companion of his youth. He and the prisoner were boys together, they sat in the same schoolhouse, played in the same schoolyard, lived in the same village. One is a *man*, the other a *chemist!* but I say in all earnestness, that I would rather be the innocent Kentuckian who hangs — the *man*, my friends — than the renegade who hangs him!" The attack was vicious, and I realised that his words could move men to violence had no violence been previously contemplated. Why did Judge Elford allow this personal attack, some persons may ask? It was not his place to prevent the defence

from breaking my testimony by any method possible, and when the attorney was through I realised that, regardless of the verdict, I was disgraced in the land of my old home, and I felt, too, that men present were ready, perhaps by violence, to take the part of Red-Head, should the jury decide that he must hang.

But the closing argument of the prosecution modified conditions somewhat, and the charge of the judge to the jury was so clear and comprehensive as to leave no cause of complaint by either party.

"The evidence is circumstantial, but it is necessarily so in cases such as this, for those who poison others are never seen to do the act. They are like thugs who lie concealed in the night and deal a man a blow from behind. And yet," he added, "not only must the jury be convinced beyond a doubt that the prisoner bought the strychnine, but that strychnine was in the stomach, and that the prisoner administered it. If such has been proven by the testimony offered, the prisoner is as much subject to the severest penalty of the law as though he had fired a bullet into the victim."

Much more did this learned man say to those who held the life of the prisoner in their hands; coolly, impartially, clearly, was the charge given. After the judge concluded that afternoon the jury retired, and then we sat awaiting their return, — sat until the evening's shadows were nearly on us.

. . . . . .

No longer an object of attention, I changed my place to one of less conspicuity. I drew my chair back into a corner made by the witness box and the prisoner's raised platform, and from that position found that I could observe the entire room, and be less exposed to peering eyes. To my left sat the judge, to my right, in the

second row of spectators, sat Susie and Cupe, and directly in front of me the prisoner. By his side stood the sheriff with exposed pistols ready for a touch, and beyond these two, nearly in line with them, sat old man Holcomb amid his men from the mountains. When I looked at Red-Head, I could see the sheriff and Holcomb, for they were all in line and covered by the same field of vision. Buzzing voices broke now upon the ear, for during the recess the tongues of the men of Stringtown and of Stringtown County were loosed. I fancied, too, that many coats that had been buttoned previously were now open, but this may have been fancy.

How would these men take the verdict of the jury in case it was against the prisoner? What would be their programme? I looked at Holcomb; he made no movement, nor yet did any of his clan. Red-Head sat impassive; Susie's eyes were downcast; Cupe seemed to be asleep; Judge Elford rested his head on his hand, and tapped the desk gently with a pencil; the armed sheriff stood upright and still. Then at last came a message to the judge, who sent back an order, and soon the jury filed slowly into the room and stood in line while the foreman presented a folded paper:

"We do hereby find the prisoner guilty of murder in the first degree."

Then Judge Elford rose, and as he did so I caught his glance, and so did others, for he swept his eyes about the room, resting them now and then on a face. Finally they turned to the prisoner. "Stand up, prisoner," and Red-Head arose.

Slowly, distinctly, the judge pronounced the sentence of death. Had I been the murderer the message could not have affected nor shocked me more. Not a muscle did Red-Head move, not a tremor in his frame, not an

evidence of fear or shame did he exhibit. And when the words were spoken, "I do hereby sentence you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and may God have mercy on your soul!" he gave no show of emotion. But I saw him glance toward old Holcomb, who then awkwardly arose, a picturesque figure, and amid silence as intense as that in which Cupe figured in this same room many years before, he politely asked of the judge:

"Is thar no hope fer the boy, Jedge? Kin an old friend from the moun'ns do nuthin' fer the lad?"

"Nothing."

"Ef I'll go down ter whar he stan's an' take his place — will yo' let the boy go free?"

"I cannot."

"Et 's a life yo' wants, yo' man ov law, a life fer a life, but et seems ter me thet et ain't fair ter take a young one fer thet ov the old man who hed lived his'n away. I 'm old, Jedge, an' the boy 's young; take me 'n let him live et out."

"I cannot."

"He 's the last ov his fam'ly, Jedge, an' I 'm the last ov mine. Thar ain't no hopes fer me, but the boy hes prospects."

The judge shook his head.

Holding out his left hand and pointing his long finger at the upright prisoner, whom he faced, the old man slowly said: "He an' his'n killed every Holcomb but me, an' me an' mine killed every moun'n Nordman but him. Thar 's a feud betwixt him an' me, an' et must be fought ter the end fer the honor ov the two fam'lies what 's dead."

Then came a movement so quick that I, who had both Holcomb and the prisoner in line, hardly caught its import before the deed was done. The right hand of

the old man suddenly drew a pistol from some unseen pocket, and with one sweep of the arm discharged it full into the chest of Red-Head, who, with eye close fixed on the speaker, as that movement was begun, caught one of the weapons from out the belt of the sheriff. Younger, quicker and more expert, his hand was not less sure; the two flashes lighted the room as if but one, the two reports were simultaneous.

A drop of blood sprang into view, just in the centre of the forehead of the old man, who dropped lifeless into the arms of his companions. The prisoner stood upright; his face turned white, his lips moved slowly, and as by a mighty effort he said: "The feud is over, Holcomb." He struggled to stand, and murmured: "I did n't pizon Uncle Nordman; I shoots like a man; et 's a lie, I say." Then he sank slowly into his seat, raised his head by one last effort and muttered: "Bury me beside ov little Sissie in the mou'ns, and bury the doll with me. I hain't no other friends but Susie and the doll."

I, who sat near him, heard every word and saw every movement he made. That flash came from a weapon which did not rest, that bullet went straight to its mark in the dusk of evening from a moving pistol; and then I thought of the five holes in a circle around a centre shot made on a mark in the Stringtown schoolyard in the years that had passed.

CHAPTER LXIII

A STRANGE LOVE-STORY

NEITHER the next day nor yet the day following did I return to the University. I had arranged for an absence of two weeks, and of this three days remained. Fortunate is it that this was so, for I was not in condition to attend to my class duties. The tragic ending of that trial unnerved me. In the privacy of my home I repented over and again of my course in the matter of this expert testimony; not that I had any question concerning its scientific accuracy and truthfulness, but because I appreciated that I had gone out of my way to assume a responsibility I could easily have declined. The penitence I did involved no change of character, and probably had I to do the work over again I would have made no change of conduct. The vicious personal attack of that lawyer for the defence ran ever through my ears, the pleadings of Susie in my laboratory the night of the storm, and the generous entreaty of Judge Elford in the privacy of his home — in which he asked God to strike him lifeless rather than that he should be forced to make a death charge on the expert testimony of a chemist — would not be quieted. To this may be added the effect produced by the dramatic climax of the trial and the last words of Red-Head, spoken when, for the first time, the only time, his skin was white. I visited no one in Stringtown, I saw no

one, and yet, I repeat, not yet was it remorse that possessed me. The second day of my seclusion passed, and late that afternoon came a double surprise. Old Cupe appeared bearing a letter to my mother, who retired from the room to read it, leaving Cupe standing near where I was seated. I exchanged a pleasantry with the negro, to which he replied in his usual polite manner. Then he added :

" Ma'se Samuel, yo 'll 'scuse de ole man ef he ax a quistion ? "

" Surely, Cupe."

" Et seems t' de fool nigger es ef Red-Head might hab been alibe had he gone back t' de mount'ns 'bout ten yeahs ago ? "

" Yes, Cupe."

" An' he would hab gone but fo' Susie."

" Probably."

" An' ef yo' had not come back t' tole de truff 'bout de pizon, recken de jidge might hab let him gone scott free ? "

" Possibly."

" De fool sign what yo' might hab fergot 'bout said dat Red-Head 'ud die sudden an' dat Susie an' yo' 'ud be de cause ob et. Fool sign, nigger sign, yo' know."

" Yes."

" But et 's monstrous cu'yus how et jes happened t' come true — "

At this point my mother returned and dismissed the negro, who did not have a chance to finish his " quistion," but he had said enough to illustrate that he still watched the record of the evil omen.

" Sammy," began my mother, " I hope to-morrow in part to repair the wrong I did when I forbade you meeting Miss Susie Manley."

" Miss Susie Manley ? " I asked in surprise.

"Yes, my son."

"Explain yourself, mother."

"The girl known as Susie, the adopted daughter of the dissolute Corn Bug, was in reality the child of his half-brother, Mr. Manley, who met her mother at a Northern watering-place. He kept the matter secret, but in some manner Judge Elford learned of it, and at once visited that part of New York State to investigate the subject. He found that Mr. Manley became involved in a love affair with this woman and married her in secret very soon after the death of his first wife — so soon that publicity would have been a reflection on himself and a humiliation to his children. For this reason perhaps, absolute secrecy was observed by him. The judge states that he acted cruelly, even to leading her to believe she was not married, and brutally driving her from his door, but that was years ago, and no good to the living can come of uncovering those incidents. The sinful man went down to sudden death without having done the child justice. Judge Elford found the record in New York State clear and perfect, and on his written statement, and a legal process as well, the girl has come into her own good name and her share of the father's fortune. This I did not tell you sooner, knowing that you were worried over the case in which you were to be a witness. But that professional subject is now off your mind, and the future only concerns you."

"Mother, I thank you for telling me this, but I asked no Court record to give me the privilege of loving Susie, nor could I love her better had she a hundred birth certificates from the Court and from Society. You are too late, however, in voicing your good intentions, for the girl loved another; he is dead, and I testified against him. She will never forgive me — never! that I well know."

"Susie will dine with us to-morrow; she has accepted my invitation. Cupe brought the note. This is a surprise that I had in store for you, but for good reasons I did not speak of it before receiving her acceptance of my invitation."

"Susie coming here to dine with us; are you sure of it, mother?"

"Read her answer."

"And yet, mother, I cannot believe she will be pleased to have me present. I fear the result of our meeting may be painful to both of us."

"My child, you do not understand women. They are not always what they seem to be, nor do they always know themselves. Possibly Susie did not love Red-Head as you thought she did, and even if it is true, she will now turn to another."

I did not reply, for I was perplexed. My mother was not a match-maker, and I felt that she wished only to undo a wrong that she had previously done the girl and myself. But she did not know all that I knew; had she done so, she would never have arranged a meeting. The girl who came to my laboratory in a winter night and begged me in behalf of Red-Head to remain away from Stringtown, who stood indignant before me when I declined to do so, who threw into my face the words, "God help you, man of science!" and then left me late at night in that storm to seek the old man in the mountains, could have no love for me. This my mother did not know, or she would never have sought to bring us together beneath her roof.

At the expected hour the next day Susie came. Self-possessed as she had always been, no evidence of grief or traces of sorrow were on her face. We talked of other times, of other lands and of current events. My

mother left the room. But still no word did we utter concerning the tragedy through which we had so recently passed, or of the incidents in which we had taken part during the years that were gone. But I thought of all these things, and I think she did too, although no mention was made of aught that lay nearest my heart.

When the hour for her departure arrived, I turned with her into the way that led back through the pasture toward her home. On the distant fence sat Cupe awaiting his charge, and when he saw us he shuffled on ahead, leaving us far behind walking together in the meadow. At last we stood again in the shade just where we stood once before on the crooked narrow path that led through the valley; in the very spot where I had handed her the flower that afternoon long ago. Did she think of that day? I cannot say, but I know that I did, and impulsively, as I had done before, I caught her hand.

"Susie, when we last met in this valley I stood before you as I do now, pleadingly, but you begged me as a personal favour to ask my mother's permission to finish a sentence that I longed to speak, and this request, in a moment of weakness, I foolishly granted. I asked her consent, as I promised you to do. Yesterday she spoke again, and I am now free to say all. For I too have waited long." I seized both her hands, pressed them between my own palms and told my story.

She looked down into the grassy path, and replied: "I accepted the invitation to your home to-day because I wished you to tell me this that I might answer. It is now too late. It is now too late."

"Susie, if it is too late, you have been the cause, not I. I loved you then, I love you now. Is a man's love so light a thing?"

"Mr. Drew, I am no coquette, and I have not sacrificed my womanhood by leading you to express your love for me in order to reject it. I have led you to say what you have said in order to free you from a hopeless attachment. This distress I once saved myself by asking you to wait, as I knew you must wait if you sought your mother's permission to speak. I gave myself this chance, for I wanted to say yes; I hoped that it might some day be possible for me to say yes, as you have wished me to. But to-day, without any hope whatever, I repeat it is now too late."

"Do you love me, Susie?"

"Yes; I will never love anyone else." She had withdrawn her hands from my grasp and stood with downcast eye twirling a leaf between her fingers, then it dropped on the ground.

"But you once loved Red-Head?"

"As a friend; misfortune drew us together. We were both homeless. He was nobody but Red-Head. I was Susie Nobody. Our sufferings and our persecutions were in common. What could I do but cling to him after that incident in the Stringtown school? He loved me, too, and he also knew that I loved you. Had he not been true to the promise I forced from him by reason of the love he bore me, long since muscle, and not brain, would have won. Had I not pleaded with him, he would, years ago, have done you harm, for murder was in his heart. I loved you, and I saved you, but I sacrificed myself in doing so. This I also wished to say before you left Stringtown, for I long to have you think kindly of me; that is why I came to-day to your home, for this purpose I am with you now."

"Susie," I said sadly, "I ask your pardon for the words I spoke, for the unjust things I felt. Let the past

go. Be my wife; leave Stringtown, with its hateful memories; go with me to the North."

"It is now too late, I say, unless"—then she stopped.

"Unless what?"

"Unless I, too, learn to be a chemist and become as assured as are you that strychnine killed Mr. Nordman."

"With your education for a foundation, two sessions of special application will be sufficient to accomplish you so that you can apply all the tests I used."

"And will you be my teacher?"

"Gladly."

"Will you promise to act toward me as though I were any other student, to neglect me personally, to reprimand me for my awkwardness, and be patient with me in my dulness, to speak no word of love?"

"Yes, if you will it so."

"I shall apply for permission to matriculate in your University," she replied. "I shall ask to take a special course in Chemistry, for that alone is what I need to free myself from this suspicion."

"And when you are convinced of the accuracy of the tests I used, will you be mine—my wife, Susie?"

"Yes; I hope it may end that way."

"It cannot be otherwise. But women are creatures of deep prejudices and are often controlled by their emotions and not by reason. What if you should not be convinced?"

"You will need my prayers, and shall have them." She slipped her arm into mine, and we walked to her home in silence. She understood me, and at last I understood her.

After the parting I retraced my steps toward Stringtown, and when I reached the spot where she stood

between the hills I stopped and picked up the leaf dropped at the moment she said, "Never will I love another." I placed it carefully in my note-book, and as I did so a face came from out the thick bushes that close bound the path; so close was it that I could have touched with my finger the intruder.

"Ma'se Sammy, de spot fo' de sayin' ob yoah lub speech wah slubrous, but de bush what meets de lebes 'bove yoah head wah a bad omen. De leaf yo' hab picked up am a hoodoo leaf, et am de leaf ob de witch-hazel; de cunjah woman use et too."

I saw that Cupe had been concealed in the tangle, and had heard our words. "Cupe," I said, "I tell you again that I care nothing for your omens and charms. Let the witch's leaf work its devilment, Susie and I understand each other. You take good care of your mistress, and I will answer for the safety of the keepsake leaf in my vest pocket." The head of the old negro was withdrawn, there was no reply, and again I turned toward Stringtown.

CHAPTER LXIV

"I CAME TO SAY FAREWELL"

IN my laboratory in the University on the Hill once more I became absorbed in work. The past seemed like a dream; it might have been accepted as a dream but for the presence of Susie, who faced me in the classroom when I lectured, who patiently bent over her desk in the hours of study, and who perseveringly stood before her table in the experimental laboratory. She came to her work regularly, and attended to her studies as persistently as though her ambition centred only on the science of chemistry. No word of praise, however, did she get from me, for she gave me no excuse to speak it; no chance occurred by which I could break my promise of personal neglect; she would not have it, and she knew how to hold me off. Strangers were we seemingly to each other, although my coldness was not self-sought. I was the weaker of the two, much the weaker; I craved to hold her hand again as I did that evening in the path which led through the witch-hazel bushes, but she gave me no chance. I would surely have broken my vow, I could not have helped breaking it, had she but given me a glance such as she could have given; but no glance came; she was not cold, nor yet reserved — no, nor indifferent. The same eye that in the valley path led me on to speak of my love now held me aloof. I taught her chemistry as

methodically as I did the others; only that far could I go. No familiar word or pleasantry could I nerve myself to utter. She knew how to control herself and to manage me; she was strong and appreciated her power, for more than once when I was determined to ask her to reconsider her course and grant my prayer she gazed into my face, and then my tongue failed. It was silent love on my part, love that made my heart ache and gave me greater pain than ever came from out the hate I once bore Red-Head.

There came a day when this girl who gave me no word or glance other than that of deep regard told me that she had decided to go to Europe for a season. My heart sank. We stood alone in the University grounds; she had taken the opportunity of our meeting on a by-path to tell me.

"Susie," I replied, "you do not know what I have suffered since you came here. You have tantalised me beyond endurance; you know that I worship you, and yet you turn me off as if I were made of stone. And now you intend to leave for Europe, you who promised to be mine when chemistry enough was gained to enable you to verify the tests I once made for strychnine."

"I shall not break my promise."

"Then you will marry me, Susie?"

"When I return I shall come to you, and shall stay with you forever, unless—" She paused.

"Unless what, Susie?"

"Unless you need my prayers."

"Twice have you said that you might have to pray for me, Susie. What do you mean?"

"That I may not find the test for strychnine as I hope to find it. I am deeply troubled, Professor Drew; not cold, not heartless."

"And if you are not satisfied with my tests?"

"More prayers will be needed than you will say, and I shall devote my life to offering them." She left me standing on the walk meditating over her words, and soon thereafter she departed from the University. Cupe, who had been her servant in the boarding-house, left, too, when she did, but he gave me no parting word. He had been very grum since our meeting in the thicket; possibly he was offended over the incident concerning that leaf of witch-hazel which I refused to throw away.

Another year passed. Premature grey hairs were reflected from my mirror, for my beard and hair, too, were touched with frost. My mother slept in the Stringtown churchyard. I had learned to act the careless man, to cover my heartache, to smile and say idle words to women who led me to speak them; to throw back the laugh into the face of the man who lightly touched upon my bachelor life. But these were superficialities, beneath which throbbed an earnest heart longing for the breaking of the dawn which would bring Susie back, for, with the fanaticism of a fatalist, I felt she surely would return.

I sat alone in my room one evening in December. A flood of painful reflections came over me, and as was my wont when possessed by melancholy, I arose and paced the room back and forth. But as this brought no relief, I next muffled myself and started to the laboratory to brush away the torture of thought by means of the diversion that work afforded, for I had learned that work alone could crush these pangs. It was not unusual for me thus to pass my evenings, and the janitor gave himself no concern when he observed a light in my private

rooms. But I could not smother my heartache in study. Again, as I had done that memorable night when Susie came to plead for the life of my rival, I threw up the window and leaned out into the blackness. The trunks of the trees beneath me could be seen where they cut the rays of light from a feeble lamp, but their arms above were lost in the gloom. A soft wind laden with moisture was blowing from the south, and it also bore misty drops, not yet heavy enough to be called rain, but still denser than fog. These beat against my skin, and were very pleasant to my heated face. A sigh came from the direction of the two briar-clad graves; it rose and fell as did the breeze, keeping time to the wind that blew through the leafless branches.

Suddenly there was the sound of footsteps on the gravel walk and someone rang the bell.

"Open the door; it is not locked. Follow the halls to my room, No. 13; you need not knock," I called, and turned again to my thoughts.

"May I come in, Professor Drew," and I turned to meet Susie, who stood in the doorway. Springing up, I caught her hand and drew her into the room, while close following came Cupe, who remained standing while we seated ourselves beside my table-desk.

"At last you are here again, Susie," I broke out ardently; "I have waited so long for your return; you come now to stay until death parts us."

She shook her head. "To-morrow," she said sadly, "I must return to Kentucky. To-night you look upon Susie for the last time. Mr. Drew, I came to say farewell."

"Girl," I cried, starting up excitedly; "you will drive me mad. I have been led to hope and have then been heart-wrecked, until I now am desperate. You

thrust the knife into my heart while yet I was a boy, and then you held me off and turned it just enough to wrack my soul. Now I tear it out and cast you off."

She, too, arose, and stood with downcast face, while I turned and paced back and forth across the floor.

"Go!" I said fiercely, and pointed to the door; "both of you." Neither girl nor negro moved, both remained standing, and at last, relenting somewhat, I stepped close to Susie, and in a low tone said:

"Do not look into my face; turn your eyes the other way, for I fear their touch. Tell me what it is that brings you here to-night."

"I have already said that I came to bid you farewell, Mr. Drew, and to add that wherever you may be in future you shall have my prayers. I go to kneel and to work, to do whatever good one feeble woman can in the path that leads to final peace."

"I do not understand you." I spoke more gently.

"Nor can you. When I left this school I hoped to return to give you my love and become your wife. But I cannot marry a —" she stopped short.

"A what, Susie?"

"Do not ask me, for I cannot tell you." She covered her face with her hands.

"I demand it."

"Sit down, Professor Drew, and be patient. I will tell my story, and then you may supply the missing word."

CHAPTER LXV

"YOU HAVE FOUGHT AND I HAVE LOVED"

"NEED I repeat the story of our first meeting, how with bleeding feet and sheet-white face you ran into our cabin that night many years ago? Never since have I failed to see you when I closed my eyes and thought of that incident, which Cupe and Dinah took care I should not forget. They kept your name in my mind, yours and that of Red-Head. I was taught that a spell linked us three together; faithful were the two negroes to their superstitions, in which I too believed, for I was not less ignorant than themselves; then came the journey to Canada, which I recall vividly, although I was a little child. The movements of the old slaves that night, the chaining of Red-Head to the wall, the departure from the old cabin and the pathetic farewell to the graves behind it, seem strangely real to me yet; but let that pass. In my new home, near Quebec, I was baptised into the Catholic Church, and Cupe, too, learned to conform to the sacred ceremonies — for this the Lord be thanked. A miracle was it that led me from that Kentucky cabin to the holy portals of Saint Anne. I was young, it is true, and knew not the meaning of all I heard in that sacred spot; but the seeds of truth were sown, and young yet was I when one day we left that land of snow, as Cupe said, to find for me my name. I could tell a dramatic story of a toxic

potion that a Kentucky man, my father, was forced to drink soon after we entered the State. He pleaded and struggled and fought to escape the ordeal test, and, refusing still to grant my birthright, passed into the death struggles; but no good can come of reviving that incident.

"At last we were settled again in our cabin home, and then you came and stepped across the conjured threshold. Cupe and Dinah whispered about you after you left, and Dinah made another conjure for you as she had done before. Then came the incident in the Stringtown school and the cruel words of Jennie Manley. You remember the part Red-Head took that day; need I repeat it; need I remind you that, leaning on his arm, I left that school for ever? Red-Head and I were thrown much into the company of each other thereafter; no other friend had I, no girl companions, no sister's love, no woman's counsel, no mother to offer words to guide me. A negro-bred child was I; superstition came with every breeze from without and every whisper from within the cabin; and the hatred Red-Head bore you came also into my life to disturb me. But I yet read and studied of other things; my mind unfolded as my form developed, and you know that, thanks to Mr. Wagner and yourself, I received a good education abroad. Finally you came again, as you may well remember, for it was the night you fought Red-Head in my presence — as I never can forget."

"Tell me, Susie," I interrupted, "why did you give me one of the roses and say that the other was for Red-Head?"

"Because I was a girl; there is no other reason, there need be no other. For the once I teased you, but I was a girl."

"You placed that reserved rose on my picture, however."

"I thought of you only. I say, forgive me."

"Go on."

"Then came the question you asked when we stood in the path in the valley, and then I did not do my duty. I led myself to hope against hope. I should have said no positively, but in a moment of weakness I deferred the painful parting, in the hope that it might not be necessary. Do you know that when I sought you in this room to beg you to keep away from the Court of Stringtown County, I came prepared to tell you of my good name and to say yes, had you asked me to be yours?"

"You do not mean it, Susie?"

"Surely. I was then aware of my birthright, and had you not turned from me, had you not crushed my heart by your coldness, had you sacrificed but a trifle of your ambition for the love of your fellow-man, I would have told you all. But you chilled me by refusing my simple request, and I left you, for I had promised Red-Head to carry a message into the mountains; you know the rest, you know the result. I kneeled beside the dead boy, dead because of you and me, and then arose and linked my arm in yours to help Judge Elford protect you from the men about you. When I bade you farewell that night, Professor Drew, we had approached the parting of the way.

"Now the time has arrived for me to bid you farewell again, and for ever; never again will we walk arm-in-arm or meet on the same path." She wrung her hands, but did not weep. Tears might have eased her heartache, but no tears came. Suddenly she stopped before me.

"You do not know what it is to live a tainted life-course. You cannot comprehend the sufferings of those who long for a touch of kindness from humanity, but who meet instead the scorn of men and women. Oh! the misery of a hungry heart. I had done no crime, no stain was on my life record, yet no friendly word came to me from girls of my age, only glances that made me shrink and creep back into the wilds. A woman longs for love; if a woman is happy, she must be loved."

"But I loved you, Susie, and you repulsed me."

"For your own sake did I do so. You did not know what you asked, but I saw the danger you were in. Better be dead than disgraced; this my own experience taught. My love for you was too deep to permit me to bring to you ruin."

"Susie, had you married me, the taint, had there been any, would have been brushed away. You are super-sensitive, you magnify those things that have been close to you. You have wronged us both, Susie; you should have married me and let me care for your future."

"Had I done so Red-Head would have shot you dead. You might have been mine no longer than a day. I saved your life as well as your good name by asking you to wait; I knew more than you knew then, and of these things I know more than you do now. I did not say no; I only asked you to wait, Mr. Drew."

"But now you can say yes. Red-Head is dead, and no stain of birth rests on you, Susie."

I read in her face the story of despair; there was no cry of anguish — none was needed — for voice could not have carried the heart touch imparted by that look.

"You once made a pledge, Susie, as I did; and these two pledges were recorded when we both were young and foresaw not the future. The penniless Stringtown

boy could not discern the independent man who was yet to be, nor could the outcast girl divine that in a day to come, her name would be the same as that of the proudest man in Stringtown County. And yet these very things have come to pass. You were looking forward, hoping against the impossible, to a time when the unjust taint that saddened your heart would be removed; I was wishing for honours and position which seemed improbable. Those youthful pledges were blunders; let us bury them."

She shook her head.

"Susie, an oath is no more sacred, if it be the output of a foolish heart or of inexperience in the affairs of men or of error of judgment, than a child's empty promise. You were a foolish girl, I a silly boy; the oath of each was an error. Now when these absurd errors of both heart and intellect can be seen, is it right that our lives should be further sacrificed? Rather, is it not a duty that we should make amends for the crime we have done in fostering this stupid fanaticism, which has kept us apart in the past and bids fair now to wreck our future?"

But she made no answer.

"What is the object of life, Susie? To rise in the morning and go to rest at night, to plan and scheme and work! To laugh a little, smile a little. To speak a kind word or say a harsh one, to lighten the heartache of a fellow-man, or make his life more bitter! To make amends for errors, to fight, to love!"

She raised her eyes. "You have fought, and I have loved," and again her eyes drooped.

Then abruptly she asked: "Will you give me back the little box I handed you that night in the cabin in order that you might keep in mind the fact that I too had made a pledge?"

I drew from an inner pocket the tin box; it had never left me.

"And must I give this up?"

"Yes; no man has the right to such a keepsake as that from a woman in the place where I am soon to be."

I opened the box and drew from it a lock of black hair.

"Can I not keep this lock of hair?"

She reached out her hand, but I hesitated and made no motion to return the box. "The keepsake was only loaned you, Mr. Drew."

I pressed the tress to my lips and then gently laid it across her palm. As I did so the empty, coffin-shaped box fell upon the floor. Old Cupe shuffled forward and picked it up.

"De shape am gruesome, Ma'se Drew. Yo' p'r'aps memberlec' dat Cupe pinted t' de shape ob dis box de night he han' et t' yo'. But de sign am fool sign, yo' know."

"All signs are fool signs."

"P'r'aps yo' memberlec' dat yo' shake de han' ob Cupe 'cross de doah-sill dat night, too. Guess dat fool sign hab 'scaped yoah min'." He stepped back into the shadows.

Then Susie resumed: "And this reminds me that I am not here to argue over things that might have been; and reminds me also that I have not told you why I came to-night. Listen. You applied the colour test for strychnine, and on that test Judge Elford gave the charge that led to the death of poor Red-Head."

"Yes."

"Laudanum was administered to Mr. Nordman before the physician came."

"Yes; I found morphine too, but no other alkaloid."

"Professor Drew, are you aware that Mr. Nordman took his usual bitters before partaking of his breakfast?"

"And what of that? Has not a Kentucky gentleman the right to take his dram before breakfast?"

"Are you aware that it was a tonic made of wild cherry bark, golden seal root, and whiskey?"

I saw that while the girl had not yet unfolded her scheme she was driving me to a corner. Suddenly we became antagonists.

"Why did you come here to-night," I said. "Have you not done enough of wickedness in wrecking my past life? But for you Red-Head would have gone back to the mountains."

"I repeat, Mr. Drew, the tonic Mr. Nordman drank was made of golden seal root, wild cherry bark, and whiskey."

"The fact, if it be fact, has nothing to do with the strychnine," I sneered. "That is a very common tonic in Kentucky.

"Golden seal contains a colourless, innocent alkaloid."

I stood so near that I could easily have touched her. Her eye was fixed on mine, and I felt its force when she spoke that name, golden seal. I saw now, too, the end of her argument, and that she proposed to claim that I had mistaken this substance for strychnine.

"I 'll squeeze her pretty throat," I thought to myself. "The love of other men has suddenly changed to hatred; for less than this other men have strangled women they held dear." I raised my hand; the muscles of my wrists were fixed, the fingers claw-like; the devil possessed me when I lifted my arm against that defenceless girl.

But a black face came now between us, a black hand

pushed the girl back. "De gearl am but a chile, Ma'se Samuel; lis'n t' de chile."

Thrusting the negro off, I attempted to reach again for the throat of Susie, who, making no movement, stood seemingly undisturbed. Then I was looking into the muzzle of a pistol. "Yo' 'blege de nigger t' keer fo' de chile; better yo' let her go on wid de story an' den go back t' Kaintuck. Cupe am monstrous suah yo' caint hurt de chile."

There was no effort to sham action. I knew that the negro would shoot before I could harm his charge. My arm dropped and the watchful guardian slunk back. Then Susie continued:

"Golden seal, I said." She looked me in the eye, awaiting my answer.

"Even if this is so, that substance is not a poison, nor does it give the strychnine poison test."

She took from her pocket a small vial containing a white powder. "Will you test that powder for strychnine?"

I turned to my reagents, always convenient in this laboratory, and applied the test. The blue-violet colour of strychnine sprang into existence. "It contains strychnine," I said with some agitation.

"It does not."

"Susie, that is strychnine. I have sworn to it before, and now reaffirm my statement, but I add to it the further oath, as in this very room I have done before. My reputation is at stake. *If that be not strychnine my life goes out.*"

"Please do not think of violence. I beg you to do no harm to yourself. I, too, made a pledge that night, a silent vow, and am now on my way to begin its fulfilment. Now I seek you to release you from thought of

"*WHERE cluster others who live to love, and pray and die in Nazareth*"

me, not to judge you further. This I promised you to do. My object is but to show you that I must go elsewhere than with you. Put up the weapon, Cupe. Professor Drew would not harm me."

I was silenced. Again I tested the powder, first for alkaloids, then for strychnine, and again the characteristic colour appeared. "It surely contains *some* strychnine."

"No trace of strychnine, Mr. Drew, I assure you. Under these conditions, your test is at fault. I believed you were wrong when you testified before the Court. I knew that Red-Head told no lie. You swore by your tubes and glasses, but I believed in the word of a human being in whom I trusted. You were a great chemist, I a weak girl. You powerful, I helpless. And yet I was right and you were wrong."

"And so you assert," I continued, "that strychnine was not present?"

"Alas, yes! You have but to properly mix hydrastine and morphine to obtain the colour reaction of strychnine, although neither will give it alone. These two substances you admit were present in the material you tested, do you not?"

"I do."

She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Professor Drew. I shall leave you now; at your leisure in daylight you may verify my statement."

"Where are you going, Susie?"

"Where neither taint of birth nor dishonour rests on any soul; where purity of heart and love of God are one and inseparable; where ascend the prayers of those who live not for themselves, but to work in humanity's behalf. If from this peaceful Mother Home I go out into the world, it shall be to serve mankind, and when

the life-work to which I devote myself henceforth is done, my body will rest in the blessed home of the dead, where cluster others who live to love, and pray and die in Nazareth. But while I live you shall not want for prayers, my brother." She extended her hand. "Bid Susie farewell for ever."

She turned to the door, and then my self-possession deserted me. Leaping forward, clasping her arm with both hands, I held her back. "Come back, my dear one," I cried; "you have no right to bury yourself alive; you can live with me, and yet pray for me, and serve mankind and God, too, by living in the world."

Then uprose the words Judge Elford once had spoken, a prophecy now: "Such a lovely creature must be holier and lovelier if blossomed untarnished in heaven."

She dropped her eyes, and I saw a tear glisten and then roll from her half-closed lashes.

"I cannot. The pledge is made." Still I held her hands.

"Thank God for the one tear you have shed, Susie."

Preceded by Cupe, she moved into the dimly lighted hall and then drew her arm from my grasp, passing onward until by an angle both were shut from my sight. And then I stepped to the front window, threw it up and again leaned out. From toward the left, where slept old Scroggins and his sister, came the weird song that the night sometimes sings; it rose as my wild heart-cry had done, and died into nothingness, as had my fruitless pleadings. From beneath me just then two forms passed into the feeble light of the gas-lamp and next were swallowed in the darkness beyond.

CHAPTER LXVI

"TO WHAT HAS AMBITION LED?"

I CANNOT say how long I leaned out of the window. My heart was desolate. That mournful tune of the wind and the two forms that vanished in the night as the sad refrain wore out were companion pieces which by eye and ear carried despair to my soul. But at last I did turn back and closed the window. On the table stood that vial of white powder and beside it also the dishes used in testing it.

To my mind came the fearful oath I made to Susie when I affirmed that strychnine surely existed in that test case. "I know potions which leave no mark and yet do their work promptly. If this be not strychnine my life goes out." I turned to my locked cupboard, in which were to be found my most valued and rarest specimens. Opening it, I took therefrom a wide-mouthed bottle containing a quantity of small plant bulbs and a letter. Removing the letter, I replaced the bottle of bulbs, and turning the key, seated myself before my desk. Unfolding the letter, which was post-marked in a certain part of Arkansas, I read as follows:

MY DEAR PROFESSOR DREW: By mail to-day I send you a plant which grows in this section and a few bulbs from the same species. These possess remarkable powers. Three children recently ate of them and died slowly and painlessly. They retained possession of their full mental powers to the last.

My efforts to relieve them were useless. I have tried the tincture of the bulbs on rabbits; they became languid, seemed not to suffer at all, but slowly wasted away. At last they quietly went to sleep and did not awaken. In the same manner the children died. Please give me the name of the plant, and also investigate its constituents.

Sincerely yours,

_____ _____.

The name of the writer I suppress; he is a reputable physician. Across the face of the letter in my own writing I find recorded: "Too dangerous a drug to be made known through science to the public." Twisting the letter, I touched it to the flame, watching it burn to the last spark, and then I turned off the gas and went home. The next day I asked William, my assistant, to remain after school hours, saying that I had a powder to investigate. Together we applied the strychnine colour test, to which it responded. Then pure white alkaloid of Golden seal and pure morphine were separately tested, no blue-violet colour occurring with either. Mixed in proper proportion (one part of the alkaloid to four of morphine), the reaction of strychnine asserted itself.

I said to my assistant: "Bring me the reserved portion of the material we tested in the Stringtown poisoning case."

He went to the basement and returned with it. This substance we also tested, with the former result. The next day we purified the crystals, and by appropriate method, now that I had an inkling of the nature of the mixture, I separated the alkaloids. *No strychnine was present.*

"I can supply the word Susie did not speak when she refused to finish a sentence, William."

"What word?"

"Never mind. I shall do my duty." I opened my private locker, and took the bottle containing the bulbs. "William, crush these bulbs in the iron mortar, add alcohol, make a tincture of them. Be very careful; this makes a powerful potion. William," I added, "I shall be very busy for a time writing a work which I wish to complete within three months. I shall consider it a favour if during that period you will assume all possible details of the laboratory. You may leave me now; I wish to begin."

From that day I spent my spare time at my desk. I lived my life over and passed again through the scenes which concerned me in my boyhood. And each day, with the cold determination of a fatalist who had sworn to do an act of justice, I took ten drops of the tincture made of the bulbs from Arkansas. From day to day I grew weaker, but suffered no pain. My friends were at last alarmed. I gracefully submitted to the closest examination that the medical profession could make, but no fault could be found with any organ. No specialist could discover an abnormal condition. Still, I lost strength, flesh, and energy. At last I kept to my room, and then became confined to my bed. Wise old Doctor Smith thought he knew everything, but I smiled at his lack of knowledge in this case. He was a professional man of attainments, — I a scientific man, and we were both taking a lesson of our master, empiricism. At last he declared that his tonics and stimulants had on me no more effect than water; and then I asked: "Doctor, how long will I last if no sudden change for the worse occurs? Do not be afraid to tell me, Doctor. I knew ten weeks ago that your remedies could not avail in my case."

"Professor, you will surely last two weeks," he replied. "What puzzles me, however, is that you have no symptom of disease, no pain, no loss of appetite, no fever, no delirium, no depression. Your temperature is normal, your heart-beats strong and full; you are well in every way, but are slowly wasting."

"I have been declining for ten weeks," I answered. "But death like this is pleasant; at least, it would be to one whose mind is free from remorse. Will you do me the favour to send William to me, Doctor," I asked, "and at once?"

"It is useless to attempt to deceive you; too well you appreciate your condition," replied the physician. "I shall send William, and to-morrow will call as usual, hoping that this last prescription will effect a change." I smiled in reply, and the wise man left me.

"Be seated, William," I said when he came; "I have a favour to ask of you and a story to tell. But before beginning, lock the door: we must not be disturbed. Now, open that drawer, take from it the package of manuscript, put it on the table and after this interview, in detail at your leisure record and add to the manuscript the substance of this interview. Draw your chair closer to my bedside, for talking exhausts one as weak as I am."

. . . . . .

Here ends the manuscript as written by the hand of Professor Drew. J. U. L.

CHAPTER LXVII

THE MUSIC AND THE VOICE DIE OUT FOREVER

MANY of the residents of Northern Kentucky can recall the familiar form of old Cupe, a black man who, with violin in hand, during the summer months wandered about that section of the State His garments were of many colours and patterns, and were abundantly and curiously patched. Old and feeble was he, queer in action and shrewd in tongue, but polite to a fault. To one man he would give a curt question, to another a shrewd reply or a comical side remark, but always would he ask of each: "Hab yo' seed de Susie chile sense I gwine dis way?" or, "Hab de deah Susie chile gwine yoah way?" Some considered him a professional vagrant, others thought him demented, although there were people who knew that he was searching for his life charge, who disappeared from Stringtown seemingly without bidding any one farewell. It was generally accepted that the childishness of age had touched him, and all agreed that the demented old man was harmless.

Three days before the close of the Period of Retreat at beautiful Nazareth, in Kentucky, the Mother Home of the patient Sisters of Charity, the form of old Cupe might have been seen advancing along the road from the village of Bardstown. Reaching the entrance to the grounds that surround the quiet building which shelters

those self-sacrificing women, whose greatest pleasure lies in doing charity in the world, and in praying for the betterment of mankind, he passed the entrance and reached the broad avenue that leads to the central building. Passing along this, he came to a lane which led to the right and terminated before an uplifted cross bearing the form of the Saviour, while at its base were many rows of modest white tombstones. The old man bent the knee, as is the wont of all good Catholics before a sacred shrine (although he was not a Catholic), and then passed on toward the house before him. It was the hour of five, the hour for closing the service in the little chapel which nestled to the right of the great home building. From out the front door came now the good Sisters in their sable dress and white caps; silently they scattered over the grounds, each absorbed in meditation. The negro stepped to the side of the elm-flanked road, took off his tattered hat, and with bent form stood as silent as were the nuns who passed in pairs and in groups. The eyes of a few were raised as they met his shadow on the drive, but they dropped at once; still the majority moved on without making any recognition whatever of the presence of the lonely man who had entered that sanctuary. Then along the path came one of the throng whose face arrested the gaze of the negro. His torn hat now dropped to the ground, the hickory cane fell from his nervous grasp, and then he kneeled on the gravel with eyes riveted on the girl. Raising his arms, he extended them toward the silent woman, "Susie."

Hearing the voice, she raised her eyes and caught sight of the intruder. A sudden start, a step toward the kneeling man, a reaching out of her arms, and then, as could be seen, by a strong mental effort her form resumed its normal position, her eyes dropped again to the

ground, and she too passed on, and walked through the lane that led toward the crucifix.

The negro arose and remained standing by the edge of the gravel roadbed, until the silent Sisters retraced their steps, but this time the face he knew so well passed him by, no upturned eye met his look, no faltering step nor outstretched arm; and as night fell the aged wanderer turned and left the sacred grounds.

The next afternoon the old man again stood beside the avenue at the very junction of the path, again he kneeled and held out his arms toward the sweet-faced girl, and imploringly called her name; but this time she made no recognition of his presence. True to her vow, withstanding temptation — for this friend of other days stirred her emotions to the heart-depths — she passed, and turned back to leave him in the gloom of evening standing, violin in hand, as before. But the next afternoon the Retreat of Silence ended, for the eight days of prayer and meditation had passed, and then the faithful nuns came out of the church talking with one another, and free to speak with whomsoever they met. And now the girl called Susie sought at once the spot where the negro stood; she held out both her hands, and burst into tears.

"And is this dear old Cupe?"

"Et am Cupe. He hab trabelled up an' down, up an' down, lookin' fo' de Susie chile."

"Susie no longer, Cupe; no longer the Susie you knew in the world."

"Yo' am walkin' an' talkin' an' yo' hab de same sweet face."

"Tell me of Aunt Dinah."

"She am pow'ful weak, an' sits in de ole cabin waitin' fo' Susie; an' each time when Cupe come up de walk an' look in de doah she say, 'Wha' am de Susie chile?'

An' den Cupe say to hisse'f, 'Go back, ole Cupe, an' walk up an' down till de gearl am foun'.' "

"Did you get the money I placed with Judge Elford to care for you and Dinah during your lives?"

"Et am all safe waitin' fo' de Susie gearl t' come back an' spen' et."

"That can never be, Cupe."

"An' caint yo' go back wid de ole man?"

"No; this is my home, and that lane leads to my final resting-place. Never yet did one of my sisters break her vow, nor shall I. Go back to Dinah, Cupid, say to her that Susie is no longer a part of the world."

He thrust his hands into the mass of rags in which he was clothed, and took out a purse well filled with bills. "Yo 'll honah de ole man by takin' de money."

"Is this part of the money I left with Judge Elford to support you and Dinah?"

"Et am."

"Carry it to Dinah. I have no need of money; I am comfortable."

"An' mus' de ole man go home alone an' say t' Dinah de dear gearl 'll nebbah come back t' de cabin?"

"Yes."

"Could n't Cupe an' Dinah come t' a cabin h'ar'bout an' lib wha' dey kin see de big house yo' libs in? Et 'ud be monstrous soovin' t' de ole man."

"No, Cupe; bid me good-bye and go home to Dinah."

"Please, Missus Susie, yo' needn't feah no troub'l; Cupe 'll jes come down t' de walk in de ebenin' an' stan' by de side ob de road, an' he won't say nuffin' t' boddah yo'. Yo' may pass up an' down, an' Cupe 'll look on yoah sweet face, an' den tu'n 'bout an' go back t' Dinah."

"I am with you always, I love you as much as ever. But you must not come here to live. Go back to Dinah and be happy in the old cabin."

"An' dis am de end," he muttered, "de end ob de walkin' up an' down, an' up an' down." Then he added: "Ef yo'll be de one t' say good-bye, an' 'll let de ole man stan' heah fo' a bit t'-night, dah won't be no cause t' scold him, fo' in de mahn'n he'll be walkin' back t' Stringtown. Honey chile, he wants t' stan' heah till de sun goes down, till de da'kness settles obah de lan' an' obah de house what shets yo' up ferebah."

"Good-bye, Cupe, my dear old Cupe," said the sweet-faced Sister. She pressed his black, wrinkled hands between her white palms, while the tears trickled down her cheeks. Then she turned and left him standing where the cemetery path joins the great elm avenue which leads down to Nazareth.

The shadows settled as fall the shades of summer's evening in this midland between the North and the South. The mournful cry of the whippoorwill, that strange bird of night, arose from out an old elm to the right, and from the left came the answer. Then rang the bell that summoned the nuns to prayer and repose, and soon thereafter, throughout the great house, each light went out. And now occurred a thing unknown before in Nazareth. From near to where moaned the gloom-birds a soft strain of music floated onto the air and into the windows of the nuns' silent house. The melody was that of a single violin, its tone so plaintive that it thrilled each listener with a sense of sadness. The good Father in the little house to the right stepped to the door; seemingly heaven was sighing to some one in that great bank of buildings, where all was dark and still. Then a husky voice, which, wordless to all but

one, seemed scarcely human, arose and blended in the melody; but to that one of the listening nuns it breathed a familiar refrain:

Yo' ax what make dis da'key weep,
Why he, like uddahs am not gay;
What make de teahs roll down his cheek
From early dawn till broke ob day?

The music and the voice died out forever; the moon cast the elm trees' shadows across the vacant avenue where stood the mourning singer; once more arose the cry of the night-bird.

THE END